

ScOTPRESS

ENTERPRISE -



*Manuel
Garcia*

LOG

ENTRIES

73

a STAR TREK

FANZINE

CONTENTS

The Human Condition	by Vicki Richards	P 3
Deadly Reverie	by Sue Meek	P 20
The Truth, Like Dreams	by Brenda Kelsey	P 21
Future Dreams	by Maureen Frost	P 26
Together	by Maureen Frost	P 26
Losing	by Fiona Culpeck	P 27
Too Late	by Gladys Oliver	P 27
I-Chaya's Adventure	by Janice Pitkethley	P 28
Vulcan Dawn	by Monica Burnett	P 31
Pain	by Fiona Culpeck	P 31
A Time For Friendship	by Christine Maybank	P 32
Help Wanted	by M.E.B.	P 42
The Thresh of Us	by Doris Schulze	P 43
Exodus	by Linda Bryant	P 44
Once You Become a Star Trekker	by Linda C. Wood	P 62
Deadly Pride	by Karen Hayden & Elizabeth	P 63
Understanding	by Gillian Hovell	P 64
The Gift	by Elizabeth	P 71
The Hamstrib Affair	by Joyce Devlin	P 72
Alien Dreamer	by Linda C. Wood	P 76
When Fates Collide	by Alinda Alain	P 77
Song of the Starman	by Linda C. Wood	P 100
Shadows	by Sheryl Peterson	P 100

Illustrations - Cover : Marilena Maiocco
P2 : Uhura by Ann Humphrey

A ScoTpress publication

Editors - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini
Typing - Valerie Piacentini
Proofreading - Janet Quarton, Sheila Clark & Valerie Piacentini
Printing of Masters - Janet Quarton
Printing - Instant Print Services
Distracting - Shona

Enterprise - Log Entries 73 is put out by ScoTpress and is available from -

Sheila Clark
6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
by Dundee
Scotland

(C) ScoTpress February 1987. All rights reserved to the writers and artists. Anyone wishing to reprint any of the material herein is asked to obtain permission in writing first. It is understood that this applies only to original material herein, and that no attempt is made to supersede any rights held by Paramount, NBC, BBC or any other holders of copyright in STAR TREK material.

ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 73.

Our thanks to all those of you who wrote to congratulate us on winning the Best Zine Award at UFP Con '86. We pass your congratulations on to our contributors.

Technically-minded readers will see a change in our presentation with this issue. Janet has found **another** new toy, this time a program that allows us to title the stories without depending on Letraset. This, we believe, makes the titles look more professional. We are also using this program to print the zine, since it allows us more flexibility of typeface.

In addition, we have had to change our printer as the firm we had been using got rid of its printing department. However, we have found another printer whose prices are comparable. Printing is now offset instead of photocopied.

Unfortunately, the change of printing method means that it will no longer be economically viable to do small-run reprints.

Zines in the pipeline are 'ENTERPRISE INCIDENTS 8', containing stories by Sheila Clark, in March, and in April we have 'ATTUCLAC' by David Gomm. I'm going to be personal here and say that this is one of my favourite stories, featuring as it does David's redoubtable character, the erstwhile Irish Vampire, Ensign Potato.

If anyone can help with an address for Doris Schulze, would they please let us know. Our Christmas card to her was returned 'Unknown', and we have a contributor's copy for her.

As usual we welcome submissions of fiction, poetry and artwork for Scotpress zines. We are looking for series-based action-adventure stories, preferably with some character inter-relationship. Alternate universe stories are acceptable, but even these should not be movie-based, K/S, or involve the death of main characters, or be primarily about other ships. These ~~are~~, after all, "The voyages of the Starship Enterprise..."

Submissions may be sent to either -

Sheila Clark
6 Craigmill Cottages
Strathmartine
By Dundee

Valerie Piacentini
20 Ardrossan Road
Saltcoats
Ayrshire



THE HUMAN CONDITION

by

Vicki Richards



The three Enterprise officers emerged from the transporter process to find themselves in what appeared to be a fairly sumptuous living area, spacious, well-designed and subterranean.

Spock's eyebrow was on the rise. Kirk caught the action, almost without looking.

"Yes, Spock," he said drily. "Not exactly what you'd expect to find on a supposedly barren world like this." He hung his phaser back on his belt and surveyed their surroundings, letting out a low whistle. "I know we're supposed to expect the unexpected..." he commented, letting it trail off.

"Hmm," grunted McCoy, by way of an answer. "Never trust anything in space, Jim. That's my motto."

Kirk and Spock shared a look which had something to do with their reaction to McCoy's sense of humour. With a grin Kirk led the other two over to where the three security guards who had been beamed down earlier stood.

"Anything further to report, Mr. Baillie?" Kirk asked the Security Chief.

"No, Captain," the man replied. "We still haven't been able to penetrate the force screen leading out of here. No-one has made any attempt to contact us. Place seems completely deserted. No life-form readings, nothing. And that distress signal seems to have stopped broadcasting. I can't find anything, but I get the feeling we're being watched."

"Mmmm," said Kirk, looking around and above him. It was more than likely. He beckoned McCoy to follow him to where Spock stood, where the chamber exited into a corridor and the invisible force screen prevented passage.

The Vulcan was busy with his tricorder, but turned as they approached. "Extremely odd, Captain - this force screen is similar in frequency to those used in the Enterprise's brig. Too similar." Spock frowned slightly.

"You mean, as if someone was waiting for us?" Kirk didn't like the idea very much.

"Possibly," the Vulcan replied. "A distress signal in Federation code - outdated, but still Federation code - giving these coordinates - which stops transmitting as soon as we beam down. Then this living area. The atmosphere is, again, almost identical to that used on the Enterprise. Then this screen... Nothing conclusive, I agree."

"But you get a feeling?" McCoy finished, not giving the Vulcan a chance to complain at being accused of intuition. "Spock - if you

think it's a trap, don't you think it'd be a damned good idea to get back to the ship until we figure out a bit more about what's going on?" He looked about himself nervously, as if expecting all manner of horrors to spring up suddenly all around him.

"I don't know what you two need me along for at all," Kirk said, faintly amused despite the possibility of danger. "But since I do agree with your observations and decisions, gentlemen, we will return to the ship until we find out a little more. Perhaps Uhura's established some sort of communication by now." He wasn't hopeful, but it was worth a try. Besides, he was beginning to feel a little bit trapped himself - and Spock's intuition, acknowledged by its owner or not, had always proved extremely reliable in the past.

Kirk pulled out his communicator and flipped it open in a prelude to contacting the ship, as he did so walking back towards their original beamdown position and the security guards who had greeted them. McCoy and Spock did likewise, each privately relieved that this time it hadn't been too difficult to persuade the Captain that discretion was sometimes the better part of valour.

But not soon enough. Even as Kirk began to speak into the communicator, several things happened instantaneously.

The communicator suddenly gave out a high-pitched whine, so piercing and painful in intensity that Kirk dropped it to the floor, clapping his hands over his ears in a vain attempt to keep the excruciating noise out, as did all the other Humans. The more sensitive Vulcan ears got it worse. Even through his own agony McCoy recognised that if it went on much longer Spock was going to pass out.

Then the force screen blocking the exit to the chamber flared and grew. With a brilliant blue-green light it rapidly expanded, brightened, and went dead. At the same time the security guards vanished.

The silence following was so profound that it was itself almost a noise. The three Enterprise officers took their hands from their ears and straightened up, Spock waving McCoy and his mediscanner away in a manner that said, 'I'm all right - let's get on with business', as he strode over to the location of the now apparently dead force screen and began to take tricorder readings.

But McCoy had had enough. "No permanent damage," he told Kirk, and watched the anxious expression dissipate slightly. "To any of us. At the moment, anyway."

"Whoever has got us, Bones, seems to want us alive."

"For now."

Kirk conceded the point and didn't bother to answer. He was extremely annoyed with himself for not realising it might have been a trap early enough. "Any theories, Spock?" he asked the returning Vulcan.

"Only that someone, singular or plural, has deliberately entrapped us for some reason at present unknown. Only us, not the security guards. Where they have been transported to remains a mystery. We are unable to contact the ship. Our only path seems to be to explore this place. The force screen is no longer present, Jim." Spock knew they had no choice.

"Our captor or captors appear to want us to go that way." Kirk grimaced - he didn't like being anyone's puppet. "Very well - we'll play along with them. For now," he added threateningly for the benefit of any hidden observers. He wasn't going to show too much subservience, even if he didn't exactly hold the upper hand at the present.

Into the corridor they went, phasers at the ready. Whether or not they'd be able to use them was another matter. Anyone or anything capable of producing the effects they'd just seen would probably be able to cause a phaser malfunction also. Using them might actually cause the users injury, set to stun or not. But they might have no choice - they might just have to use them, whatever the consequences.

What now? thought Kirk. *What this time? I should have seen it sooner - seen the trap.* Although he knew full well he'd begun to have suspicions at much the same time as Spock and McCoy, still he blamed himself. He was supposed to be the Captain, dammit

He turned quickly to glance behind him, to make sure that all was still well with the others following him along the passage, and was met with an expression on the Vulcan's face he hadn't really expected. Very mild reproof - almost amusement. *It said, I know you're blaming yourself for getting us trapped, Jim. I also know your habit of preoccupying yourself with self-blame as a shield against thoughts of imminent danger, to yourself and us.*

And that's just what he was doing. He was sure that was what Spock's expression conveyed. The Vulcan knew him so well. *And I know you well enough to know what you'd say - 'It couldn't be helped. Guilt in this case would be illogical - and use whatever shields you need'.* Probably much what McCoy would say, if in a different way, as both of them had done in the past.

Yes, my friends, thought the Captain, *I'm glad you're with me. As always. I just hope we get out of this one okay.*

They came to an abrupt halt as the downward sloping passage ended at an open archway. No force screen this time. Brightly lit rooms interconnected. A dining area; what could only be a communal recreation area; largish rooms obviously designed to be reasonably comfortable living quarters.

Three of them.

All very pleasant and friendly. But ominous.

McCoy's worried grimace and Spock's almost-frown told Kirk that once again their suspicions tallied. Three lots of living quarters. And three of them.

In silence they continued to explore. It was obvious the rooms had never yet been occupied. All was new and waiting. For them?

The first of the private rooms yielded the discovery of a collection of ancient hardbacked books to rival Kirk's own, and a lot of the same ones, plus some he'd always wanted and had not been able to get his hands on. Somewhere in the background he could hear McCoy begin to mutter that he didn't like it at all.

McCoy liked it even less when the next chamber displayed a case of antique surgical instruments in pride of place. Suspicion

overpowered any envy he might otherwise have felt. Whoever was holding them had taken a great deal of care to make their prison attractive. A contradiction in terms, and one he feared they might all come to understand only too well. And there was another thing. Something about this place was vaguely familiar. He couldn't put his finger on it, but...

Take that picture over there - the one Spock was studying so carefully. And the one in the first room. He'd seen some like them somewhere else, but he couldn't quite remember where. He was sure it was important.

The third room was the worst shock. Another painting, more books; and old-fashioned pianoforte and a Vulcan lyrette.

It was the piano that did it. "My suspicions are confirmed," Spock announced into the silence. "I believe I know who is attempting to hold us here."

"Who, Spock?" Kirk asked tiredly. He was afraid he might know as well.

"Yes, Mr. Spock - I too would like to hear if your observations are valid," said a voice from behind them. The voice Spock had expected to hear. All three turned to face their captor.

"Mr. Flint," Spock acknowledged. "Or perhaps I should address you as Mr. Da Vinci. I recognised the paintings first of all. Or at least, the artist."

"Flint will do very well, thank you, Mr. Spock. That name has served me fairly well for a number of years. The identity of my final lifetime, perhaps. I trust you find your rooms to your liking? As much as any prison would be to your liking - I do understand, gentlemen," responded Flint, observing Spock's grim face and McCoy's and Kirk's openly hostile ones. Especially Kirk's.

"But holding you, at least for a while, is unavoidable," continued the millenia-old Human. "Perhaps if you would come through into the dining area, we can be more comfortable while I explain further."

The highly suspicious Starfleet officers followed, and sat. Flint inclined his head slightly, concentrating, and no-one present was more than mildly surprised when robots arrived, hovering, in response to the obviously telepathic signal. Descendants of M-4, more sophisticated and dextrous - but probably no less dangerous. For a man of Flint's proven intelligence - genius, Kirk corrected his thoughts - and abilities, a logical progression. The only area of his research he'd continued?

Flint had apparently caught his thought.

"No, Captain Kirk, there are no more Raynas. I could not bear it again." His voice was regretful, sorrowful even, and as the two locked eyes it was clear they shared a remembered hurt, a deep wound, healed over but not forgotten.

Kirk's mind flipped back in time. The Rigellian Fever epidemic on the Enterprise. A desperate landing on Flint's planet in frantic search for Ryetalin, the antidote. Flint's co-operation - at first unwilling - in the search. The meeting with Rayna, Flint's ward. And then he'd gone and fallen in love with her. Rayna, so beautiful

and intelligent. Rayna the perfect.

Rayna the android.

The horrible discovery he almost hadn't been able to cope with. Then the other discoveries. Flint's seeming almost-immortality. He had told of his origins, a soldier in ancient Mesopotamia, and how he learned he was a freak, how he could not grow old or die. The names he had borne through history, the men he had been. 'You have been such men,' McCoy had said. Da Vinci; Brahms; Brach; Solomon; Merlyn. Amongst others. How he had changed identity, leaving before those who knew him realised what he was. How he had finally acquired the knowledge to make Rayna, the perfect woman, designed to be his mate through all eternity, the one love who would not grow old and die, leaving him to mourn and grow ever more lonely.

But it hadn't worked out like that. Flint had needed to waken Rayna's still-dormant emotions, and he'd used Kirk to do it. Her emotions had been brought to life, all right, but then she had turned to Kirk. Flint she had loved as a father, a mentor, not the way she had loved Kirk. And Flint had tried to force her to choose.

It had killed her...

The sudden movement as one of the robots began to serve him brought Kirk back to the present, but a mental picture of Rayna lying beautiful and dead on the floor between them remained with him. He faced Flint with a hard glare. Then he saw the hurt he felt echoed somewhere behind the eyes of Methuselah, and he took the edge off his voice a little.

Finally he managed to bring himself to speak to Flint, hoping his voice did actually sound something near normal.

"This is all very pleasant, Mr. Flint," said the Captain, "but we're all busy men, and can't really afford to waste time socialising. Perhaps it might just be better if you'd get to the point of all this."

Flint looked almost amused, then he sighed. "I always appreciated your directness, James Kirk. And since I have been forced to come to the conclusion that I too am mortal - after all these centuries - wastage of time has become of more serious concern to me than it once was."

"Then my conclusions were correct," McCoy interrupted.

"Yes, Doctor," Flint nodded agreement, "you were correct. My body's regenerating capacity seems to have finally worn itself out. Your guess as to the cause also confirms - leaving Earth and its complex fields upset my metabolism, and now... now I too shall die. I still have some years left, but I am no longer immortal. And I cannot say whether I am grateful or not."

Out of the corner of his eye Kirk could see the slight movement as Spock shifted slightly in his seat, steepling his hands in front of him, for the moment ignoring the Vulcan-style food which had been placed in front of him. Spock must have had a few thoughts on that line, thought Kirk, as he himself had. Meeting an immortal was bound to make you think.

"And, being Human, there is something else I know," Flint went on. "We have to eat. I do sincerely apologise for the necessity of

your capture, but it was truly unavoidable. When you know my reasons I believe you will realise why. But for now, it is illogical to starve without reason, as Mr. Spock will tell you. Please allow me to be as hospitable as I can be under the circumstances."

So they ate and exchanged small talk, trying in the meantime to discover what exactly Flint had been doing since they had deposited him at the Starbase.

He hadn't been treated badly. Flint had discovered - much to his surprise - that humanity had actually improved a little during the last few hundred decades. Although he'd done his best to live a hermit-like existence, he'd never managed to avoid people entirely, and when his isolation on his planet in the Omega system had been ended by the encounter with the Enterprise, he'd been forced to mix once again.

Perhaps it was the interaction with alien races that had increased Human tolerance. It interested him. But, treated well or not, he had still felt something of an oddity and, his cover blown, he'd found it necessary to assume yet another identity and find still another hiding place, where he could continue his researches and come to terms with the fact that his long, long life was nearing its end.

The wealth he had accumulated over the centuries was still there. He had purchased a ship and materials, and had set off back to his planet once more. There, he'd stripped it of everything he might need, and had left again, searching for a place where he might hide himself.

So he had finally come to the barren planetoid in whose bowels they now sat. Once Flint had made another M-4-type robot, building his underground hideaway had proceeded quickly. And until now he had been left alone to continue his researches.

"Mr. Flint, you haven't exactly acted like someone who wanted to be alone. Why broadcast a distress signal?" Kirk asked when Flint finished his tale. Although apparently relaxed, Kirk was in fact ready to grab his communicator the instant Spock, who was still surreptitiously monitoring tricorder readings, should tell him that the interference which had caused the communicators to malfunction had dissipated. Not that he expected it to happen, but the ship had to be informed of what was going on. Scotty should be told to get her away from here. Kirk had seen Flint's abilities demonstrated before; he did not wish to see his Enterprise a prisoner again.

No, he didn't expect to be able to re-establish communication, not without Flint's permission, and that didn't seem likely. He had a bad feeling that Flint didn't intend this to be a short visit. And another thing; those damned robots knew Spock was scanning with the tricorder. Spock knew that they knew, but was continuing anyway. A defiant Vulcan? But they hadn't made any attempt to stop him; they just underlined the fact that it was no use anyway. They had to find out what Flint wanted.

"Until several months ago I did indeed remain alone," Flint was explaining. "And then - then I made a discovery which I felt I could not cope with alone."

"Indeed, Mr. Flint? That somewhat surprises me." Spock's curiosity was off and running.

Flint nearly smiled. Then he sighed instead. "Really, Mr.

Spock? I am not infallible, and I know it. The discovery of which I speak is so far-reaching I do not feel qualified to decide its future."

"Its future?" McCoy was beginning not to like the sound of this at all. What was it? Some unimaginably dreadful weapon?

"Yes," Flint went on as if lost in his own thoughts, "its future. Whether its existence should be brought to the notice of mankind, or whether I should destroy it."

"And you want our advice?" Kirk was disbelieving.

"I have never met other beings more qualified. Despite the circumstances of our last meeting, I was greatly impressed by you all." Flint sounded as though he meant it. "This planet, although apparently barren on the surface, is on a starship patrol route. It was safe for me, already explored and abandoned by Starfleet as poor in minerals and resources; and with my techniques for blocking sensor readings I would not have been found, unless I wanted to be. Which is where you three gentlemen come in. I knew that sooner or later the Enterprise would be here on routine patrol; I monitor Starfleet transmissions on a regular basis, and I do have sensors of my own."

"Therefore, having identified the starship nearing here as the Enterprise, you began to broadcast your false distress signal," Spock finished for him.

"Correct. And as you can see, I have prepared quarters for you all as comfortable as possible in the time I had. Perhaps now you would wish to inspect them more fully?" Flint began to rise from the table.

Kirk didn't. "Just a moment, Mr. Flint," he said in a tone which caused all hearing it to stand still and listen, as it always did. "Before I go anywhere I'd like to know just how long you intend to keep us here. And I want to contact my ship. Now."

Flint looked thoughtful, and not at all surprised. "The answer is, I do not know how long I will need you to stay. That choice will be yours. And when you do make that choice, I would ask you to remember this: I could prevent you from contacting your ship. I could do worse. I remember how repellant you found the idea of your ship and its crew in suspended animation. But I am not going to do any of that. You may contact your ship in a moment." He turned to the ever-present robot servant. "M-6, cease blocking subspace communications with the Enterprise." Then he nodded to Kirk to go ahead.

Spock also nodded in answer to Kirk's questioning stare. With a suspicious glare at Flint Kirk flipped open the communicator. It chirped happily in the correct manner.

"Kirk to Enterprise - Mr. Scott, are you there?"

"Captain, aye." Scott's relieved tones filled the room. "Scott here. We were getting a little worried, especially when Baillie and the others came back like that. Transported without warning - shook them up a bit."

"We're fine, Scotty." Kirk also breathed a sigh of relief. The security men had never left his mind. "But we've made some unusual discoveries here which warrant further investigation. Remain in

standard orbit - I'll get back to you later. Kirk out." He didn't bother giving instructions for an attempt at leaving the planet. Given Flint's known capabilities such an attempt would be impossible without their captor's knowledge, and Kirk had decided that co-operation with Flint might just be the best course of action for the moment - at least until they found out just what he was up to.

Kirk closed the communicator. "Thank you, Mr. Flint."

"Thank you, Captain. And since you've been so reasonable, perhaps you'd be interested to know what it is that I have discovered."

Flint took some small pleasure at observing the consternation on his guests' faces, even Spock's. They'd all expected him to deliberately hold back the information for at least a few hours, just to gain a psychological edge, if nothing else.

"It might be helpful," Spock commented drily.

"When I last saw you, I told Dr. McCoy that I intended to devote the remainder of my lifespan to studying the Human condition," Flint continued. "Or, as I interpreted that phrase, the limits put upon mankind by its mortality. I should perhaps have expected my researches to progress eventually into the area they did. Gentlemen - I have discovered the secret of how to induce immortality."

"Immortality?" Kirk sounded disbelieving.

Spock remained silent, but couldn't keep the astonishment completely out of his expression.

"He means it." McCoy was completely, absolutely horrified.

"Indeed I do, gentlemen. The ramifications are endless. Perhaps now you perceive my dilemma? Perhaps not. There is only one way for me to be sure of that - for you also to experience it."

Flint gave a signal and three new robots, smaller than the others, glided into the room, taking up positions directly above the Starfleet officers. "I am sorry to have to do this, but it is necessary."

Almost as he spoke blinding blue-violet rays shot from the robots to surround the three Enterprise men. Kirk's last impression before he passed out was of all the nerve endings in his body catching fire simultaneously. He didn't like it at all.

Spock awoke first. Two seconds later he had dismissed his initial question of how Flint had transported him to his quarters and was on his way to check on Kirk and McCoy. The implications of what had apparently happened to all of them were of such enormity that they would take many hours of meditation to absorb; but then, he might well have those many hours to spare. He intended to ignore all that until he had ascertained whether or not Flint had actually done to them what he had threatened.

Kirk was just in the process of standing when Spock entered the room.

"How long have we been out, Spock?" Kirk was rubbing the back

of his neck - he felt stiff all over.

"Seven point oh-nine standard hours, Captain," came the reply.

Just at that moment McCoy appeared to stand in the doorway with the Vulcan. "A good night's sleep, hmm?" groaned the doctor. "Then why do I feel so terrible?"

"If this is how immortality feels, you can keep it." Kirk's joke fell on somewhat stony ground.

"If we are." Spock wasn't really sceptical. It would be the logical course of action to check. He didn't underestimate Flint's abilities.

"I thought you might feel that way," said Flint from the corridor. The man was developing a habit of appearing out of nowhere. Kirk didn't like that either - in fact, he didn't like any of it.

Flint beckoned them to follow, and having no real choice they did, not with a very good grace.

A concealed doorway gave access to Flint's own private section of the underground complex. First stop was the laboratory. Kirk could see the almost-avarice in the Vulcan's eyes. It was one hell of a laboratory. Spock's tricorder sat waiting on top of a desk. The Vulcan picked it up, then went to the place that Flint indicated. Advanced sensory/medical equipment waited - McCoy's turn to be jealous of Flint's hardware.

Spock and McCoy took the readings of themselves and of Kirk. There was no doubting the answers they got. The tricorder readings and Flint's equipment told the tale.

"The same disproportionate body function readings I had from Flint once before," Spock said in confirmation. "Fascinating."

"I don't find it fascinating." McCoy was too miserable even to think of sniping at Spock for the word.

"Then it's true." Kirk still found it difficult - impossible - to believe. But it was true.

Spock broke the ensuing silence. "What now, Mr. Flint? You say you want us to decide the future of this... discovery. I presume you wish us to remain here while we make it?" The Vulcan sounded the nearest to being annoyed that Kirk had ever heard. No doubt Spock did find the situation fascinating, but Kirk also knew Spock's reverence for the individual's personal freedom, something Flint had taken away from them in grand style by making them immortal.

Immortal? Somehow it just wouldn't sink in; the implications were just too staggering. He didn't want to really think about it, but he was going to have to. He had plenty of time - they all did... now. One thing was sure: immortal or not, he was going back to the Enterprise, and taking Spock and McCoy with him. Flint had better not try to stop him.

But Flint surprised him again, shaking his head. "No, gentlemen, I impose no restrictions upon you. You are free to leave when you wish. I have accomplished that which was necessary. Believe me when I say I regret what I have had to do to you.

Remember, of all Humans, I know what immortality feels like. To help me make my decision you too have to understand truly what living forever means, or else your choice would not be completely valid."

"Mr. Flint, you are no longer immortal - the readings I have just taken confirm this," interrupted Spock. "Why have you not used the process on yourself?"

"Perhaps in a few centuries you will understand why, Mr. Spock. I cannot bring myself to do it. Not yet. There is always the chance that when death is so near that I can feel it I will then use the process on myself. But would it be right? Is it meant for us? Questions you must try to answer, for I have asked them for millenia, and found none. Go back to your ship. Carry on your lives. One day you will have need of a place to go, a place to hide when it becomes impossible to hide the fact that you are different. You will find, as I did, that you have no choice. This place will be waiting for you. I may well be dead by that time, if I have the strength not to use the process on myself, in which case the decision whether to destroy my invention or not will be yours alone. You are the only living beings I can trust to do it."

"It's monstrous, diabolical!" McCoy began. "Using us as guinea pigs! Flint, you're..."

"Playing God?" Flint cut him off mildly. "Perhaps I am. But Dr. McCoy, please remember - I too have no real choice. If you were me, what would you do?"

"Destroy it!"

"Really, Doctor? But think - in all the years you now have, how many discoveries will you be able to make - how many medical advances? How many ordinary lives will you be able to save because of it? How much suffering will you be able to alleviate? Isn't that worth what's happened to you?" Flint watched the effect his words had on the doctor. McCoy couldn't answer.

"However," Flint went on smoothly, "I must insist that you stay yet another few hours - another twenty-four, to be precise. There may be side effects - nothing serious, merely severe dizziness and possibly nausea - which may be noticed by your crew. I do not need to tell you of the real moral necessity of keeping this completely secret, possibly forever. Captain Kirk, you may contact your ship to inform them of the delay. And now, gentlemen, I shall leave you."

With that he left them to their thoughts. And to their immortality.

Kirk lay in his quarters totally unable to sleep. He had contacted the Enterprise; in six hours they'd be beamed up, back to a life which would never be normal again.

For the umpteenth time he looked around the room that Flint had prepared for him. Would he spend eternity here in this place? Years from now, his career in space over, past retirement age but still young. Forced to hide from normal people. The Enterprise decommissioned, a rusting hulk. He didn't think he could bear it. Centuries from now, and all his years on the Enterprise would be just a fraction of his life. His eternal life. He could cope with the concept of eternity as it related to the vastness of the universe,

the cosmos - he had to, or they'd never have accepted him for Captain. But eternal life... Kirk could feel madness lurking somewhere at the edges.

He had to talk to Spock, needed to hear another voice. The hours of the night just before morning had always made human beings incline to depression. He'd feel better in the morning. Had to. Flint had coped - he was still sane.

And he had something Flint hadn't had - friends, like himself. Spock and McCoy would be with him through eternity. Perhaps they wouldn't have to hide; perhaps Flint was wrong about that. Throughout the ages, the things they could accomplish together!

They'd cope - they had to. Kirk thrust the madness away from him. Perhaps in time they'd even discover a way to reverse Flint's process.

But... immortality? The dream of mankind throughout all its history, the dream of half the races in the galaxy. Could he really throw that away, now he'd been given it? A few centuries - he'd see the future... see it and know it. He'd often wondered how it would all turn out. Perhaps he'd even have a part in it. By then he would have learned such a lot, he'd know how to help...

Suddenly Kirk saw the danger. Here he was, James Kirk, having ideas about having a part in the destiny of the universe. If he felt like that, what would such a thing do to an unstable personality? The fear came back. Kirk went to find Spock.

In the early hours McCoy had finally fallen asleep. Wretched and unhappy, his body had finally had more sense than his mind and had tried to give him a few hours respite.

But now he was having nightmares, and even in his worst dreams he knew that when he woke he'd find it was all still true.

The dreams showed him vision. The future, a future when all he knew and loved were dead or grown old except him, Jim and Spock. And maybe Flint too. All locked in their nice tidy prison until the end of the universe.

But no - even that wouldn't be the end. By then they'd have found a way to travel quickly to another universe. It'd start all over again. And over and over and over.

What if they all went mad with it? An eternity of madness, dreams of vast power. Or just an eternal padded cell? Flint the madman, meddling with things he should've had better sense than even to think about.

They ought to destroy it. Ought to. Or... should they? That was the worst thing - McCoy wasn't even sure. Perhaps it was a good thing. Flint was right about it increasing man's achieving power. He could discover things, cures, surgical techniques - and in return, what was he sacrificing? Only his own mortality.

Then the despair came back. He wouldn't just be giving up his mortality, he was giving up his right to be a member of the Human race. What would he be? What would they all be?

With a start McCoy woke up, drenched in sweat and shaking. A brief moment's blessed respite when his tortured subconscious told him he was safe in his Enterprise cabin and none of it had happened. Then came full awakening, and the realisation that his nightmares were real.

He had known they would be.

He was tired, very very tired, although he'd had some sleep, for all the good it had done him. He was even too exhausted to panic any more.

He had to think logically, as Spock would - it was the only thing that might save him. Logic and reason - gave you something to cling on to when emotion ran riot. He'd always known it, even when doing his damndest to get Spock to admit the value of feeling. If he was really honest with himself, he'd have to admit that both he and Spock knew the value of each other's ways, even if neither of them would admit it.

Well, here was a time when he needed Spock's way, and he needed someone to talk to. Decisively McCoy got up from his bunk and went to find the others. He didn't suppose they'd be sleeping either. And for once he needed to hear Spock's logic.

Vulcan training ought to give one an edge when it came to assimilating the implications of such matters, Spock mused to himself as he programmed his request for a hot drink into the dispenser. The device obediently delivered it and the Vulcan took it back to the desk where he once again sat, still deep in thought, sipping absently.

He had spent a long time in very deep meditation - six hours exactly - and the disciplines had helped, but perhaps not as much as they might have been expected to. But then their dilemma was a particularly emotional issue, especially where his two friends were concerned.

For himself, he knew he could cope. Logic held, and guided, and sometimes even comforted - a paradox he must one day discuss with Sarek. One day.

Spock had found that even he was not immune to the temptations of speculating whether it would be moral to use Flint's process on those one considered important. Sarek and Amanda. He would welcome Sarek's opinion on this matter - yet he knew he could not ask for it. The thin end of the wedge.

Yes, the temptations would be very great. And the pressures. The concept of immortality would be too much for many Human minds to take, even though mankind had dreamed of possessing it for centuries untold.

And once you possessed it in fact? It could be wonderful at first, knowing you had enough time to do anything you'd ever dreamed of. Time to learn, to discover, to achieve. But after millenia? As a Vulcan he was used to thinking in abstracts, infinities; the concept of NOME, the Vulcan ALL, had been with him since childhood.

No, it was not for himself that he was concerned, but for Jim and McCoy. Almost all his meditation had been concerned with how

best he could help his two friends to accept and understand the awful truth about what had happened to them.

Yes, he thought, a reality full of awe - and perhaps of fear too?

Just then the door chime - identical in sound to those used on the Enterprise - sounded.

"Come," he said, not really surprised that he had visitors. He was glad they'd come.

Spock went to the dispenser and programmed for two coffees. His guests took them almost without a murmur. They had sat down and were looking decidedly... sheepish, he believed was the term, like Human children who had woken from a frightening dream and, having roused their parents in their panic, had decided the dream hadn't been that bad after all, not compared with the prospect of possible parental wrath.

Spock recalled such an occasion from his own childhood. Not that he'd admit it to anyone. It had only happened once - he could remember extremely vividly Sarek's amazed disbelief at such behaviour.

Perhaps that was the way to deal with it - the Human way, finding humour in even the darkest things. He didn't know if he could do that, but for his friends' sake he had to do something. Behind the apparent sheepishness the Humans hid a growing terror, perhaps even a brooding irrationality.

But they were strong, his friends, and balanced. He would have to help them find the inner strength they both possessed, and which shock had temporarily driven away.

Kirk grinned apologetically. "Hope we didn't disturb your meditation, Spock."

"I had completed my meditation, Jim. You do not disturb me. I too would welcome someone to talk to. Perhaps discussing our situation might help us all see things more clearly."

McCoy looked up from his coffee, obviously surprised, not at Spock's need for company but at his open statement of it. "Perhaps you could show me how to do that meditation business, Spock. Maybe it'd help me sleep."

Now it was Spock's turn to be surprised. McCoy actually asking him to do that? It was McCoy he was most worried about. Jim was flexible, adaptable; he might find it hard, but he'd be able to accept what had happened to him. McCoy, with his sometimes old-fashioned ideas and strong moral objections to what he'd call 'meddling in matters not meant for Humans to decide' - Spock could almost hear him saying it - might find it very much harder.

"I could attempt to do so, Doctor," Spock said as gently as he could. "However, I have not succeeded in teaching Jim to meditate correctly in the Vulcan manner on the occasions I have tried to do so. But perhaps you have more concentration."

A flash of amusement crossed Kirk's face as he recognised a Vulcan joke. McCoy hadn't even noticed.

"I'll have plenty of time to practice. Plenty of it," the doctor muttered bitterly.

"McCoy," said Spock, trying another tack, "what is it about our situation that you find hardest to accept? What is it you fear most?"

McCoy looked for a moment as if his temper was going to flare up at 'Vulcan interference and prying', but then he realised what Spock was trying to do and the motives behind it. He sighed.

"I guess you're right, Spock," he said dejectedly. "It's the only way - face it head on." Then a thought came to him. "Is that what you do?"

Spock nodded. "In a way. To understand a problem one has to face it and think it through - as logically as possible."

"For an illogical Human? I see. I don't know, Spock. It's everything about the whole situation. Immortality - mankind's dream since we first gained sentience, I suppose. Now we've got it, and I'm afraid. There'd be people who'd think I should celebrate - but I don't see you two celebrating either. Oh, there are advantages, I guess - something along the lines of what Flint said. Achievements we'll have time to make; contributions to the future - a future we'll see.

"But eternity - it's a hard thing to grasp. A frightening thing, going on and on forever, one day after another. I can't cope with that. Everyone we know dying, old age for our friends... What was it Flint said - a taste of ashes, or something? All the thousands we've yet to meet, all growing old. On and on and on..."

Spock stopped him; McCoy's eyes looked dangerously bright. "But eternity is now, McCoy - don't you see that? It is the now that matters. Every moment when it happens is now. We've known past, present and the promise of the future since birth. Why should that be frightening? More frightening than the prospect of what would have happened to us in the end if Flint hadn't done this to us?"

"Yet Flint doesn't seem able to choose for himself - not now - and he's had centuries of experience of the problem." Kirk joined the conversation - Spock had just shown him a way to manage it all.

One day at a time - the old answer. It really was the only way to look at it all. And there was that other thought - they would now always be together, the three of them, barring chances of fate, accidents and danger in the course of Starfleet service. But still none of them could be sure if it was a blessing or a curse. Perhaps in a few hundred years they would know. Perhaps. At least Flint had had the kindness to do it to all of them. Flint's years of loneliness must have been very, very hard. Kirk could almost forgive him for Rayna.

"Another aspect we have not considered fully; the process may be reversible," Spock went on, keeping the conversation as businesslike as possible - McCoy had started to look better, and he did not want him slipping into that dangerous, highly emotional state again. "When we return to the ship I intend to begin an intensive research programme, in secrecy, naturally. Eventually I am bound to discover an answer."

"And when you do, will we have the guts to see it on ourselves?"

Do we really want to give this up?" McCoy still didn't sound very happy, but certainly he sounded better.

"We have to think of the positive side." Kirk joined the 'cheer up McCoy' campaign. "Flint is right. After all, he ought to know what he's talking about. The things we'll see, the people we'll meet... What was it - the greatest minds in history, all the ones yet to come - we'll have the chance to know them, to know wonders we'd never have seen. We'll be able to develop, to grow far past what we would otherwise have become. Maybe this was supposed to happen - maybe we're mankind's next stage onwards."

"That's what I'm afraid of." McCoy's pessimism wouldn't leave him. "I don't want to be another Sargon. Even they found out the danger of considering themselves gods. And another thing - all these great achievements. What's to say we'll ever get round to them? With all the time in the universe on our hands, we might keep putting it off until tomorrow."

"Flint didn't," Kirk said. "And we're not like that - wouldn't be in the service if we were. Our basic natures would rebel against such apathy."

"Our natures might change - another thing I'm afraid of." McCoy looked absolutely helpless, sunk in depression. He'd pull himself out of it - had to, he knew. It was just that the enormity of their situation took more adapting to than most. He could see the worry in his friends' faces; he'd have to stop it, get a hold of himself for their sakes as well as his own. How had Flint managed, without such friends as he had? Perhaps he too would have built a Rayna.

Perhaps the same thoughts crossed Kirk's mind. Certainly McCoy noticed that Kirk seemed to regard Flint with something approaching sympathy when their captor once again appeared out of nowhere.

"I'm going to have to learn that trick," muttered McCoy by way of a joke, just to let the others know he wasn't really cracking up.

"I apologise for disturbing your privacy." Flint ignored McCoy's comment. "I had meant to leave this conversation until the morning; however, in monitoring your discussions I have come to a conclusion that to wait until then will be unnecessary. I do not wish to torment anyone needlessly, or more than I can help."

"What exactly does that mean?" Kirk might feel a little more sympathetic towards Flint, but he still wasn't going to allow the man to think that. "And what do you mean, privacy? If you've been spying on us, how can you apologise for disturbing something you haven't even allowed us?"

"Harsh words, Captain - an intrusion I could not avoid. I had to see if you were fully absorbing the consequences of what I have done to you." Flint sounded genuinely sorry - but unrepentant.

"And?" Kirk was beginning to get mad again. He didn't like being a zoo specimen under observation like a trained rat.

"And I discovered that you are as intelligent as I had hoped. You all understood the implications of your situation even more quickly than I had expected, and began to come to terms with it very rapidly. Please believe me when I say I regret having had to do this to you, but I really had no choice."

"Because you believe that only immortals understand what the condition truly means?" Spock joined the conversation.

"Exactly, Mr. Spock. To enable me to be sure you would be qualified to help me make the choice I eventually must, you had to know how it **feels**." Then Flint smiled. "But I am not as cruel as I seem."

"What!" McCoy exploded. "After what you've done to us? How can you say that? I..."

But Flint interrupted. "Please, Doctor, listen to me, and you will hear something which may please you."

"There's nothing you can say that would..."

"You are not immortal."

"What?"

"Not now - not any of you. I did not programme the process for permanence in this instance, though I could have. It will have worn off by now. You are all again as mortal as the day you were born. I hope that knowledge makes you happy."

Kirk paced the observation deck, thinking. Occasionally he would stop and look out at the glowing stars. The sight had always calmed him, helped him think.

He knew McCoy was in sickbay, working himself hard enough to forget their recent experiences for a while. Spock was in the lab, also working on some pet project. Had he already started working on Flint's findings? Would he? Kirk sighed. Of all the people in the cosmos, he'd rather Spock be the custodian of that kind of secret than anyone else.

But they all were, all custodians of an incredible secret. Flint had chosen them, and Kirk wished he hadn't. Or... did he? It was a strange kind of honour, he supposed; Flint had known so many great, intelligent men, and now, when he felt he needed the opinion of others, their advice even, he had chosen them. It was all unbelievable.

Kirk came to a decision. He was going to find Spock and McCoy and **make** them come to his cabin for a drink. All three of them had been working far too hard since they'd left Flint's hidden hermitage three days ago; it was time they all unwound. Oh, they were okay; the shock of what Flint had done to them was already fading; but he'd given them quite a burden to carry.

And he'd done it so well. The clever trap; the careful charade of the rooms supposedly prepared for countless years of occupation; then actually **using** that process on them, so they'd know what it felt like, not just as an abstract concept but as reality.

Kirk sighed again. Flint or Methuselah, whatever you called him, he understood it better than any of them, even now. The torment that man had known. The torment and the glories. And now, aging and finally mortal, Flint couldn't make up his mind whether his discovery was a boon or a potential disaster. Couldn't even make up his mind whether or not to use it on himself and restore his lost immortality.

The Captain nodded to the duty security guard as he left the observation deck and began to make his way to sickbay, still deep in thought. He had already come to one decision; he was going to postpone any report on the incident to Starfleet indefinitely. No-one else must know.

Even so, Flint had taken quite a chance. Perhaps it showed the depths of his desperation, to risk allowing even them to know about the process. They'd covered it up well; the three security men had apparently suffered amnesia during transportation and couldn't remember anything about the underground complex. Flint's defences were quite capable of keeping everything secret.

Scott had apparently accepted their explanation, concocted by Spock - it was a good thing the Vulcans were an honest race, Kirk mused. He'd explained their disappearance by inventing the existence of a force field preventing communication and return to the ship, a force field left in action by the same people who had left the distress signal operating, prospecting miners who had apparently abandoned the place as unworkable years ago. They'd found nothing, and Spock had taken quite a few hours to render the force field inoperative. Still a sketchy explanation, Kirk felt, but Scott knew better than to ask for more. It would have to do for now.

So many people trusting them, Kirk thought. He hoped they were up to it. Flint trusting them with his secret. With the decision.

One day they would have to go back there. Flint in his isolation would still be waiting for them, perhaps. He still had quite a few years left. Yes, he, Spock and McCoy would have to go back, and then either destroy the process or use it on themselves and become its custodians. Somehow Kirk didn't think they'd make the latter choice, but he wasn't sure. Immortality could still be theirs - if they wanted it.

As Spock had pointed out, even if they destroyed all knowledge of Flint's discovery, it might still be re-invented at some time in the future. Perhaps then the universe would be ready for it.

At least then the decision wouldn't be theirs. Was that passing the buck? Wouldn't the real responsibility be to become immortal and guard the device and its secrets until that time came? Kirk didn't really know - not yet. But one day he'd have to know what to do. And he'd have to do it.

The turbolift arrived, and Kirk stepped out. He hadn't come to any decision, not really, but he was feeling unaccountably more cheerful. There were some good things which had come out of all this, he supposed.

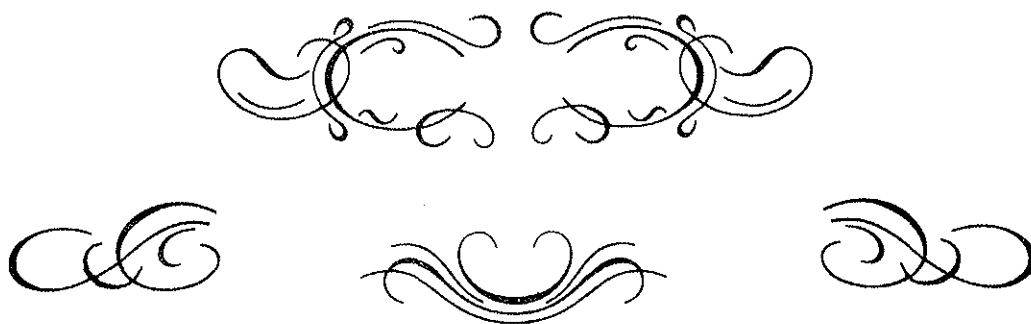
The way McCoy had needed Spock's help and advice - and his logic - and hadn't been afraid to ask. The way Spock had responded - been able to respond. He had helped McCoy - and Kirk - in a way many Humans wouldn't have been able to do. His compassion had been there for all to see, and he had been able to show it.

We've come a long way, the three of us, Kirk thought, and he began to smile, remembering McCoy's confession to him yesterday. He'd told Kirk how, at that other time when Rayna had died and he, Kirk, had been so distraught, McCoy had accused Spock of not understanding at all, of not being able to understand because he didn't know, and would never know, what it was to care. Perhaps part of McCoy's motives had been his usual, trying to get Spock to admit

his dual nature more openly to himself, but McCoy was still feeling very guilty. Spock had proved how he could care.

And another thing, too, Kirk's thoughts went on as the sickbay doors opened before him, at least when we thought we were immortal we knew we'd always be together - and we were glad about it. How many people could say that?

And they still had that choice - if they wanted it.



DEADLY REVERIE

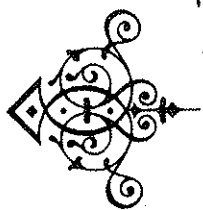
I had been prepared, in part, for his reaction;
Had steeled myself for the backlash of pain and fury
Those tidings would release.
Despite all defences, his enmity struck home:
A lance, to pierce clear through to the heart.
The wound lives within me, raw and deep.
Words linger, hollow echoes in the hall of memory.

Get out! I don't want to ever

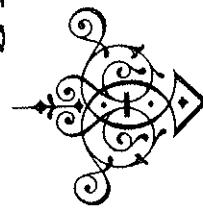
have to look at your face again!

I had no alternative. Duty permitted only one course.
In the mind, logic may grant absolution;
The heart reaches its own conclusions,
And any self-reproach is a matter I must deal with alone.
The heat of anger spurred the outburst:
Likely, it will be as swiftly regretted.
He is too fair to sustain such antipathy,
And will no doubt take steps to heal the breach.
It is useless to pretend Vulcan indifference.
Nothing will be right again
Until, once more, he has reached out his hand.
I pray he will not take too long,
For time is not a commodity we have in surplus...
The weight of more than a century presses down on me.
In both mind and body, I feel the ever-growing cold.
I have basked too long in the warmth of his caring...
And I do not wish to die without knowing it again.





THE TRUTH, LIKE DREAMS



by

Brenda Kelsey

It was night, and it was quiet. The monitors bleeped steadily.

It was a soothing sound, and one which brought pride to him. Without his skill those monitors would have been silent - his skill and that amazing Vulcan stamina. Sarek had insisted on resuming his role as ambassador, and he'd been equally insistent that Sarek was in no condition to move around. The haggling had achieved a compromise. Sarek stayed on in bed in sickbay and used the private ward as an office, with his staff doing all the legwork. A steady stream of ambassadors had paraded through sickbay, partly to assure themselves of Sarek's actual condition, but mainly to beat out some hard diplomatic deals. Those systems which had formerly been against Coridan admission had had their composure badly shaken by the near destruction of the Enterprise. The idea that the Orions (unproved - one surgically altered corpse did not constitute proof) would attempt to destroy potential allies in order to attack potential opponents had rocked any number of boats, and now all the ambassadors wanted to talk things over with Sarek of Vulcan - or failing him, Amanda. The pair had been very busy.

A determined cough roused McCoy from his musings. Chris Chapel stood in the doorway, two cups of coffee in her hands and a no-nonsense gleam in her eyes.

"Something I can do for you?" McCoy asked, his amusement showing.

"Sure is. You can drink this coffee and you can tell me that I am a fool."

McCoy accepted the proffered cup and invited Chapel to rest her feet. "Thanks for the coffee. Why would I want to tell you that you are a fool?"

"Because I am."

McCoy hitched himself into a more comfortable position, i.e., weight on spine, heels on desk. "You-all want to explain that to your kindly family doctor?" he drawled.

"Which family are you referring to?"

"Our favourite Vulcans."

"I've only one favourite Vulcan. All the others you can junk out the airlock."

"Now, now, Chris. That is hardly the attitude..."

"So you hadn't noticed! When I heard that joke Sarek made I

thought that everything was going to be okay."

"But it isn't?" asked McCoy wearily.

Chris shook her head.

"Tell me," invited McCoy.

"After you released the Captain and Mr. Spock, well, Mr. Spock made arrangements to come back next day and have a meal with his parents. When he turned up, Sarek's aides wouldn't let him in. They said that Sarek was too busy. Spock went away. He's come back three times, and each time the aides wouldn't let him in. He's tried calling Sarek on the intercom, but all he gets are his aides. He's tried talking to Amanda, but the aides won't let him see her either. Henderson, of Security, said that the aides aren't being exactly polite to him either. You could power a cryogenic chamber with their attitude."

"I hadn't noticed," admitted McCoy.

"Neither had I. Not until Henderson and I swapped information."

"I guess I'll have to have a little word with Sarek," mumbled McCoy.

"And tell him what? 'This is your kindly family doctor speaking. You will have dinner with the son you haven't spoken to in 18 years!'"

"Now where did you hear that?"

"The grapevine. Security is following Spock and the Captain around. They're both pretending not to notice them, but Security has ears, and our men are beginning to get annoyed by the Vulcans' attitude towards Spock."

"Maybe there is something I can do." McCoy untangled himself from his seat, tugged his tunic straight, and ambled into the private ward where Sarek was sitting up in bed reading.

"Good evening, Mr. Ambassador. In case you haven't noticed, it's 32 minutes after lights out."

"I am not yet ready to go to sleep, Doctor," replied Sarek evenly.

"Never mind. You can just lie there with your eyes closed and pretend," said McCoy, swinging the viewer away and switching off the machine.

"What is it that has annoyed you?"

"Your staff's attitude towards Commander Spock. It is beginning to be noticed by the crew."

Sarek considered McCoy for several seconds before stating, "My staff's behaviour towards Commander Spock is exactly the same as it has always been."

"Yeah. That's the problem," said McCoy agreeably, and waited.

Sarek considered him and his words. Neither made any sense to

him, and he said so, then watched as the hopeful look on McCoy's face slipped away.

"I guess they wouldn't, to you. But then I'm Human, and a doctor too, and I see things kinda different from you."

"Was there something you wished me to do?" asked Sarek, his curiosity rousing at last.

"Mr. Ambassador, if you don't know, then there is no way I can explain it to you."

"But you do want... no, you expect me to do something?"

McCoy shook his head, suddenly tired. "No. Not any more."

Sarek stared at the closed door for a long time, trying to make sense of the Human's words. There was something there, something vitally important to him, but he could not understand what.

Security guards Henderson and Peters-Gomez lurked with intent in Officer Country. They lurked so blatantly and with such effect that the officers walked round them and the diplomats, after several carefully random strolls along the corridor, had given up their attempts to spy on the senior officers of the ship.

The security guards had a rapidly lowering opinion of diplomats in general - one had, after all, tried to kill the Captain - and of the Vulcans in particular. The insolence shown towards Spock was slowly bringing the Enterprise to the boil.

Henderson looked up alertly as the door to Spock's quarters opened and Spock stepped out; then he frowned as Spock swayed slightly and raised his hand to his head.

"Mr. Spock? Sir?"

Spock turned slowly towards him. "Yes?"

"Are you... all right, sir?" asked Henderson hesitantly.

"I was going... somewhere, but I cannot remember where." Spock's eyebrow rose questioningly as Henderson's stomach froze.

"We were going to sickbay, to see Dr. McCoy," he said brightly. "That's right, isn't it, Pete?"

Peters-Gomez gulped, then collecting himself said, "That was sure-enough where we were going, sir."

"I forgot," Spock said simply. He looked away from Henderson down the corridor, then back at the red-haired man. "Which way is sickbay?"

"It's this way, sir. Pete, why don't you go and tell the doctor that we're coming. Always good manners to let someone know that you're going to visit with them."

Spock nodded vaguely and Peters-Gomez ran, leaving Henderson to shepherd the confused man along.

"He's what?" asked McCoy.

"Dazed. He's walking all wrong, too deliberate, like he's dizzy. And he didn't know the way to sickbay."

"Where is he now?"

"Henderson's bringing him."

"Right. Chris, the emergency procedure, just like we discussed. Do it now."

Chapel hurried off to get the necessary equipment as McCoy started towards the entrance to sickbay. He met Spock at the door and said softly,

"Hello, Spock."

"Doctor," said Spock, then he blinked rapidly and lifted his head. "I think that I am unwell."

"Do you hurt?" asked McCoy, trying to judge how badly Spock was affected.

"I hurt all over."

"In that case, why don't you come over here and lie down?"

Spock swayed again, seeming to be listening to something McCoy couldn't hear, then his eyes focussed on the doctor, brightly intent.

"I was right, wasn't I, Leonard?"

"Yes, Spock, you were right," assured McCoy quietly and caught his friend as he collapsed.

The security guards helped McCoy lift the limp form onto the bed, then they stared in horror as the monitor panel above him remained silent.

"I was afraid of this happening. Total systemic failure. He never stood a chance, really - not with those drugs." McCoy choked the words out. "How the hell am I going to tell Jim?"

WHAT ABOUT ME?

Sarek sat up in bed, the screamed question re-echoing around in his mind. Kirk still slept peacefully in the bed opposite to his, looking ridiculously young by Sarek's Vulcan standards.

He forced himself to turn and look at the bed beside his. His son was there, asleep, and looking... far too old for his few years. Sarek did not try to stop the compounded fear and relief and frustration that rose through him as he realized that he had been dreaming. He was still staring fixedly at Spock when McCoy entered, alerted by the altered readings on the repeater monitor in his

office.

"Is there something wrong, Mr. Ambassador?"

Sarek considered him.

'But then I'm Human, and a doctor too, and I see things kinda different from you.'

'Was there something that you wished me to do?'

'Mr. Ambassador, if you don't know, then there is no way that I can explain it to you.'

"No, Doctor. There is nothing wrong, now."

"Sir?"

"I was... I am concerned about the side effects of the drugs administered to... my son."

"To be honest, I'm a little worried myself. That's why I'm going to be keeping him in sickbay under close observation. Oh, I'll move him into another room so that it won't interfere with your ambassadorial duties."

"Unnecessary," Sarek said shortly, then he moderated his tone to continue, "I should spend some time resting quietly. Is that not so?"

Doctor and diplomat regarded each other keenly.

"It is advisable," said McCoy at last.

"And if you left Spock in here, then your staff would only have one room to monitor."

"Logical," muttered McCoy.

"Logic sometimes has its uses, Doctor," said Sarek, and McCoy grinned at him before returning to his office.

"Ah well," McCoy said to his cup of coffee, "I don't know what happened, and I don't care. All I have to do now is get rid of Jim back to his quarters so that Sarek and Spock can have a little privacy. Father and son are going to do very nicely, thank you very much."



FUTURE DREAMS

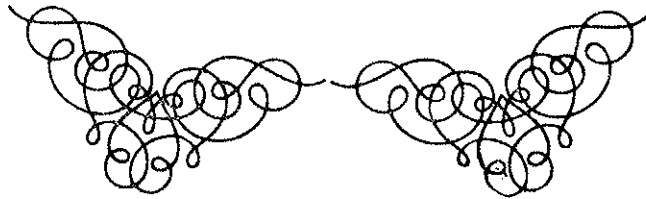


Outward slowly into space
 Moves our ship of dreams,
 Across the void of darkness,
 New worlds to see,
 New people to meet.

Deeper and deeper into space
 We take our man-made world,
 To share with other people
 All our many hopes, all our many dreams.

Across the unknown miles of space,
 Travelling across the universe,
 Sharing hopes, sharing dreams,
 With all the many peoples
 Of the many worlds.

Maureen Frost



TOGETHER

Born under Vulcan skies,
 Red with the heat of passion,
 Wherein the past it lies,
 Forgotten.

Born under paler skies,
 With passions still burning,
 Touching my soul with his eyes,
 Searching.

Travelling through alien skies,
 With logic to temper his passion,
 Our future onward lies,
 Together.



Maureen Frost

LOSING

How can you leave us?
How can you go?
Why turn your back on all that you know?

I watched you close the door,
I couldn't make you stay.
I always knew deep inside
This moment would come one day.

I wanted to cry out to you,
"For God's sake, please don't go!
Can't you see we... I... need you so?"

Though I said no words,
I kept them all inside,
Sorrow is a difficult emotion to hide.

Fiona Culpeck



TOO LATE...

Black flint mountains,
cold sentinals impaled against a saffron sky,
Brief life-giving breath, sucked into
my heaving lungs,
... Just.
Momentary panic as my world uptilts,
Twirls,
Dances before me,
I fall...
Suffocating against the uncaring dust of
this alien land.
Feathered arrowhead, festooned with my seeping blood,
Casts a shadow, pointing to an invisible hand.
Somewhere, cascading statuettes are testament
to my Captain's arrival.

Too late...

The world darkens, tosses light away,
On the edge of forever I stand,
Naked... uncertain.
Oblivion is so very lonely...



Gladys Oliver

I-CHAYA'S ADVENTURE

by



Janice Pitkethley



The last fragments of the dream are dispelled as I hear the voice I love so much. I yawn deeply then emerge from my shady sleeping place to greet my young friend.

"... 'Chaya..."

He can say my name now, after a fashion. Patiently I stand still as his hands grasp my fur, then we set off, walking slowly as my young friend is still rather unsteady on his feet. It was only recently that he started walking upright - with my help, of course! Round we go on our circular tour of the enclosed grounds. As we pass the house I see The Mother watching us from the window. She is smiling, and my heart overflows with love for her.

I have grown to love The Mother through time. She came to us from a far-off place, I am intelligent enough to know that. Her scent and actions are different from those of my Master and his people. Most of all I love their little offspring. He looks more like my Master than The Mother. I am his guardian, protector and playmate. His name is Spock.

"Down, 'Chaya."

I stop my slow walk at the sound of his voice. The hands relax their grip on my fur and he sits down with a bump! Anxiously I turn my head, but all is well. I listen, turning my wise old eyes upon him as he chatters away to me. Some of it I understand, some I do not. I sigh with delight, resting my head on my paws as the chubby hands explore the soft fur on my muzzle. I do not even move as he pokes a finger into my eye.

Soon he is tired of the sport of trying to make me blink. "'Chaya, come." I rise to my feet once more; here we go on our travels.

But where are we going? He is leading me towards my Master's parked aircar. I know that is definitely out of bounds, and try to turn him away from the area, but he tugs at my fur.

"No, 'Chaya!"

It is against my nature to disobey, even when the Little One is so young, and I allow him to lead me forward. I growl softly in my throat, trying to warn him as he climbs up on my back, trying to reach the door fastening. He ignores the low grumbling sounds I make and concentrates all his attention on the task of getting that door open. He almost falls off my back on several occasions, causing me to stiffen in alarm. At last there is a loud click and the door slides open. Reluctantly I follow as he scrambles inside.

I watch anxiously, my fear mounting as he sits in my Master's chair and touches all the strange things which make the craft come to life. Fortunately he is unsuccessful, and losing interest in that,

we climb over the seats into the rear compartment. It is cool and dark in here, and soon I realise that my little friend has fallen asleep. My eyes are growing heavy too, and I drift off to sleep with the little body curled up at my side.

What is the strange thing which has woken me? I am aware of the sensation of motion - we are moving! Spock does not stir, so all must be well. I allow sleep to overcome me once more.

All is still when I raise my head again, the silence telling me the motion has stopped.

Wake up, *Little One*. My tongue carries its message across his face.

He stirs, and opens sleepy dark eyes. "Don't, 'Chaya!" He pulls away from my ministrations.

Where are we? The surroundings are completely different and unfamiliar as we climb out of the aircar. Obviously it has taken us far from home. There is no sign of my Master. Buildings piled on top of each other meet my startled gaze. They are much larger than our home; many people must live there...

I try to follow my Master's scent, but it becomes mixed with so many others and is lost to me. Perhaps my Master has entered one of those strange-looking buildings? Spock retains his hold on my fur as we set off slowly towards them.

Aha! Someone is coming to meet us. It is not my Master, but he could lead us to him. Obediently I stand still and await his approach.

No! I will not allow this! The Stranger is trying to lift Spock into his arms to carry him away! The *Little One* still has both hands buried deep in my fur; his voice tells me that he does not want to go with this Stranger.

The growl begins deep in my throat and I allow it to come forth with all its menace. The Stranger takes a step backwards, but still does not release his hold on Spock. I feel the hackles rising along my back and my muzzle wrinkling, exposing even more of my tusk-like teeth. It is too late to stop now that my anger has been aroused; I am determined to save my *Little One* from this Stranger... There is a sound of ripping material as my teeth make contact with his person, something wet splashes onto my nose, and his grip on the *Little One* is released immediately.

Now we have to get away! Spock is too unsteady to walk very fast and that will hinder our progress. I remember how my mother carried me when I was a helpless cubling, and now I copy her actions, the long-forgotten memories returning. I pick Spock up by his clothing and carry him to safety, away from this menacing Stranger. His little form has almost no weight at all, and it does not slow me down as I begin to run, putting as much distance as possible between us and the source of danger.

I run until I am almost out of breath and the threat no longer remains. I sink down, gently releasing my precious burden. He winds his arms tightly around my neck. "Bad V'can, 'Chaya!" I understand enough of what he says and heartily agree. How dare the Stranger

threaten my little friend!

Our surroundings are quiet now, save for faint voices which I can hear in the distance. They are the voices of the young. I will investigate as soon as we have rested...

What is this place? There are so many children here - it is not possible for a Mother to have so many! In no time at all we are surrounded by them. I do not relax my guard although the children seem friendly and I sense no hostility.

Here comes another Stranger! This one is female, and I know that females do not offer any threat. She speaks softly to Spock, who releases his hold on me and allows her to lift him into her arms. I follow them into the building. No-one will prevent me, and I will not allow Spock to leave my side - after all, I am his guardian. I watch carefully as the female places him on her knee and gives him a glass containing something to drink.

I realise that I am very thirsty too. This must show as I cannot stop myself from panting in the heat. They notice my heaving sides, and the female speaks to one of the older children, who returns with a big bowl of lovely cool water, all for me. As I lap greedily I hear her giving instructions to one of the older boys and he leaves the room.

Time passes and I begin to get drowsy in the afternoon heat. It becomes increasingly more and more difficult to keep my eyes from closing...

I am jerked awake instantly at the familiar voice, turning my head just in time to see my Master walk in the door. As I get to my feet, tail lashing in a frenzy of welcome, father and son are reunited in each others arms. Although I fail to understand most of the conversation immediately afterwards, this is what happens.

My Master goes to the talking machine and touches the switches. The Mother appears on the screen, water flowing from her eyes - a strange phenomenon!

"He's safe, Amanda. He fell asleep in the aircar. I-Chaya is here too."

"Oh thank God, Sarek!"

"We will return home immediately."

So we were put into the aircar once more. I was never so glad to see familiar territory when the aircar stopped and we got out. There is nothing like home!

The incident is in the past now. I expected them to be displeased with me for biting one of my Master's people, but exactly the opposite happened. I was highly praised for defending my little friend, I was given all my favourite things to eat, and the Person whom I had bitten came to see me one day, so I know I am forgiven for that. For a special treat The Mother allowed me to enter Spock's room (when my Master was absent, of course!)

That is where I am now, curled up on the rug beside his bed. I watch over him as he sleeps the sleep of the innocent.

Happy dreams, Little One...



VULCAN DAWN

Deep and dark, deep and dark
Is the Vulcan moonless night;
Cool and strange is the desert then
With neither warmth nor light.

Long dark hours to meditate
Or, it may be, to sleep,
And some, perhaps, unknown, unseen,
May even have cause to weep.

Long is the night, but when dawn comes
The silver birds are singing;
And I have been on Vulcan when
Their gentle notes are ringing.

And I have found on that sun-scorched planet,
Beauty and strength, and my friend and brother,
A word not spoken, but sung by the birds -
The word is love, and no other.

Monica Burnett



p a i n

I'm hurt,
though how could I tell you?
I was lost
for the words that would have got the message through,
Please stay?

Fiona Culpeck



A TIME FOR FRIENDSHIP

by

Christine Maybank

Spock gazed solemnly at the Enterprise officers who awaited transportation. His gaze lingered on the still form of Captain Kirk, who lay dead at McCoy's feet. He acknowledged that Kirk was gone forever, but still found it difficult to believe that Kirk would not suddenly get up, tug his gold shirt down in that characteristic manner, and tell Spock he would see him on board later.

The nightmarish quality of recent events was all too clear in his mind for him to believe truly in such fantasies; a mind which had burned deep within the madness of plak tow only moments before. The madness was quite gone with the knowledge and realisation that Kirk had died at his hands, but unaccustomed emotions of guilt, remorse and great sadness suddenly overwhelmed Spock, and he momentarily lost control before replacing the mask of stoicism once more.

There would be plenty of time for regret, Spock contemplated as he purposely turned his back on his commanding officer and friend and strode over to T'Pau and the other Vulcans in the arena. Yes, there would be a lifetime of regret...

McCoy saw the look of anguish cross Spock's features before the Vulcan turned away. He sighed deeply, and immediately regretted the action as the dry, searing Vulcan air scorched the back of his throat.

"Curse this blasted planet!" he grumbled, rubbing a hand across his perspiring forehead. He watched Spock approach T'Pau, body erect and dignified, and McCoy sympathised with the lonely figure, though he couldn't help but admire the Vulcan's iron control. He could imagine the emotional turmoil Spock would now be experiencing, and felt his own stomach contract with remorse for making the Vulcan suffer so. McCoy gazed down and sought some comfort from the serene features of James Kirk. At least Spock's anguish would only be temporary, McCoy reflected as he felt the transporter beam reclaim him at last.

Seconds later McCoy materialised in the transporter room of the Enterprise. The requested medical team had not yet arrived, so he knelt down on the pad next to Kirk. Extracting a scanner from the medical kit he scanned Kirk's vital signs and was satisfied with the readings. He looked up and saw Scott watching the proceedings with concern.

"Leonard, what happened? Is the Cap'n all right?" he asked, indicated the large gash across Kirk's chest.

McCoy rocked back on his heels and smiling wearily replied, "It's a long story, Scotty, but Jim will be all right. It's only a flesh wound he's sustained - it looks worse than it actually is."

"Thank goodness for that!" Scott breathed a sigh of relief.

"It seems that whenever the Cap'n and Mr. Spock go planetside, one of them always returns injured. I'm beginning to believe they actually injure each other!"

"You can say that again," McCoy mumbled, standing up and replacing the scanner in its pouch.

"What was that, Leonard? I didnae quite catch what you said."

"What? Oh, nothing, Scotty. I was just wondering where the medical team had got to."

At that precise moment two orderlies arrived with a trolley, onto which Kirk was gently transferred. As the party headed for sickbay, McCoy hesitated in the doorway.

"Scotty?"

"Yes, Leonard?"

"When Spock is back on board have him report to sickbay immediately - and I mean immediately, without diverting to the bridge. Oh, and if he says anything strange, just ignore it." He saw Scott's puzzled expression and added, "Come to my quarters later, and all will be explained over a decanter of vintage amber nectar."

"Laddie, you've got yourself a deal," chuckled Scott. McCoy disappeared and Scott returned to the transporter console to dream of McCoy's alcoholic invitation as he waited for further instructions from the First Officer.

Upon entering sickbay Kirk was swiftly transferred to a vacant bed. Nurse Chapel approached as McCoy activated the diagnostic scanner. Glancing at the readings, he noted that all body functions were slowly returning to normal, and that Kirk was already showing signs of an impending return to consciousness. Christine Chapel also glanced at the monitors, and with astonishment realised that Kirk seemed to be coming out of an apparent coma. She looked at Kirk, noting his dishevelled appearance, the dusty trousers and torn shirt revealing a livid gash across his chest.

"Doctor, what happened? I don't understand the readings; they indicate..."

"I know what the readings indicate," McCoy interrupted. He probed the laceration thoroughly. "The Captain got into a fight on Vulcan which was to the death, and the only way to save his hide was to pump him full of a neural paralysers to simulate death."

"I still don't understand, Doctor," persisted a totally confused Chapel. "I thought you visited Vulcan to attend Mr. Spock's wedding, not..."

"Look, I'll explain everything later, Chris. Right now I want you to help me remove his tunic. The wound appears slightly infected and I need to take a closer look."

Christine took up a pair of scissors and seconds later threw the redundant garment into the disposal chute. "Do you know that I've lost count of the number of command shirts I've disposed of since joining this ship!" she stated.

"I wouldn't lose too much sleep over it, Chris," replied McCoy, taking over. "You'll probably discard several more before the end of the mission."

They worked on in silence for several minutes until McCoy was satisfied that no infection remained. "That should do it, but as a precautionary measure I think we should seal the area to keep it clean." Chapel handed him a spray applicator at the exact moment that Kirk regained consciousness.

Hazel eyes opened to discover two familiar faces smiling down at him.

"Hi, Jim. How do you feel?" McCoy enquired, applying an antiseptic screen to Kirk's chest.

Before Kirk could reply the cold spray came into contact with his bare skin. He yelped in surprise and attempted to escape whatever was attacking him by leaping from the bed, but firm hands pushed him back down onto the pillows.

"Damn it, Jim! Hold still, will you!" McCoy applied another liberal spray, much to Kirk's indignation. "There, all done."

"If you've finished being a damn sadist, Bones, perhaps you would kindly inform me of what I'm doing here," he demanded, indicating sickbay. "The last thing I remember is Spock trying to strangle me with that woon contraption before all the lights went out. When I wake up again it's to find myself a guest in your chamber of horrors, once more being attacked for no apparent reason."

He stared at McCoy, awaiting an explanation, and Christine Chapel also waited expectantly to hear what had transpired on Vulcan, following Kirk's astonishing statement that Spock had tried to kill him. She listened avidly until McCoy concluded his story.

"... so you see, Jim, I had to act swiftly, and the neural paralysers seemed the only logical solution to the problem. I'm only thankful it worked in time, because Spock would have killed you for sure in his enraged state. Funny thing was, when he believed he had actually killed you, all trace of the madness disappeared."

Kirk lay back, imagining the scene McCoy described, and he smiled in appreciation of McCoy's handiwork. "Well, Bones, you certainly outsmarted T'Pol, having her believe I actually died. I expect that Spock was greatly relieved when he discovered he was not guilty of murder after all, wasn't he?" Kirk noticed McCoy's sombre expression. "He ~~does~~ know that I'm alive, doesn't he?"

McCoy avoided Kirk's accusing eyes by staring at his feet. "Er... well..." he began, but his voice trailed away.

"Bones, I'm waiting," Kirk demanded.

"No, Jim, Spock doesn't know," McCoy confessed. "Dammit, everything happened so fast that it was impossible to explain to him what I had done before we were beamed back on board!" He glared defensively at Kirk, expecting some caustic comment, but it was Christine Chapel who broke the silence.

"Doctor! How could you leave Mr. Spock believing that the Captain is dead! How could you treat him so inhumanly? If you will excuse me, sir, I have work to do!" McCoy looked on speechlessly as

Chapel picked up the discarded instrument tray and strode out of sickbay.

"Now what have I done?" He looked helplessly at Kirk, but got no sympathy from his commanding officer.

"She's right, Bones. It's a pretty mean trick to play on Spock." Kirk's gaze on McCoy was unrelenting.

"Blast it, Jim, don't you think I feel bad about this? What was I supposed to do under the circumstances? Go down on bended knee and apologise to T'Pau for the deception as I told Spock you had not died after all? I'll apologise to him the minute he is back on board. He'll understand when I explain the situation to him."

"I wish I shared your confidence, Bones. I agree it would have been inadvisable to explain the facts to Spock on Vulcan, but I wish he could have been spared the anguish of my demise, however temporary, all the same. He'll be here shortly, and I don't wish to greet him like this." Kirk indicated his semi-naked body. "Am I permitted to get up and change?"

"Sure, Jim, but only if you promise to take it easy for a few days," McCoy replied, handing Kirk a clean uniform. "That means no strenuous exercise, or your memento of Spock's wedding will make itself known."

Kirk looked down at the scar on his chest. "I would rather have this as a memento of Spock's wedding than my death on his conscience." He touched the scar lightly, and smiling briefly, continued, "Nor would I have enjoyed claiming T'Pring had I been victor. Do you know, Bones, it's the first time I've fought over a woman I neither know nor particularly like for that matter."

"All I can say in reply, Jim, is that I advise you to be more selective with whom you fight in future - and beware of irrational Vulcans and hot climates!"

Kirk's smile widened. "I'll consider your advice, Bones."

"And I should consider apologising to my head Nurse, I suppose. Call if you need anything, Jim." McCoy went in search of Nurse Chapel, leaving Kirk to dress in privacy.

In the transporter room Spock descended from the pad where he had materialised and approached Scott, who was completing a post-transportation check of the console. Satisfied that all was in order, he looked up at the Vulcan and smiled.

"I trust you enjoyed your brief stay on Vulcan, Mr. Spock, despite the Captain's incapacity."

"The Captain's demise did not improve my visit, Engineer, if that is what you implied," Spock replied icily.

"I didna' mean to give offence, Mr. Spock," Scott replied indignantly. "And I am not sure I know what you mean by 'the Captain's demise'! Dr. McCoy has requested that you join him and the Captain in sickbay immediately, sir."

"Very well, Mr. Scott. If you will excuse me, I have several

important matters to discuss with Dr. McCoy before I surrender myself as Captain Kirk's murderer."

"Murderer!" Scott exclaimed in total bewilderment. "Mr. Spock..." he called after the retreating figure of the First Officer, but Spock entered a vacant lift and disappeared from view.

"What was that all about?" Scott mused. He remembered McCoy's advice to ignore anything unusual the Vulcan might say. Intrigued, he now anticipated the evening meeting with McCoy more than ever.

The lift deposited Spock near sickbay. He walked the short distance down the corridor and entered sickbay, unable to postpone the inevitable any longer.

He reappeared several minutes later, obediently following his commanding officer down the corridor - a commanding officer who was very much alive and well.

James Kirk was alive! His thoughts in turmoil, Spock had difficulty in comprehending the facts. He tried to block images of the death he had witnessed earlier - of the death he had almost caused - but the images were still too vividly painful to forget.

They entered a waiting lift and Spock watched in silence as Kirk grasped the hand rail and gave the command, "Bridge!"

That one word brought Spock out of his reverie. He felt the lift change direction as it began the ascent to the bridge, and he became aware of Kirk glancing in his direction, a smile playing on his lips. A surge of emotion threatened to overwhelm Spock once more as his tired body and somewhat confused mind tried to adjust to traumas recently endured. He felt his legs weaken and begin to buckle under him.

"Jim!" he called out.

Kirk was instantly at his side. He released his grip on the hand rail and grasped the Vulcan's shoulders in a vice-like grip in an attempt to break his fall. Their surroundings were forgotten as the lift came to a halt, awaiting further instructions.

"Spock, what's wrong? Are you all right?" Kirk demanded.

Spock remained silent for several seconds, trying to regulate his breathing. "Thank you, Captain," he eventually replied. "I am somewhat recovered now."

"You look far from recovered to me," Kirk commented. "I think we should return to sickbay."

"No, Jim, not sickbay."

Kirk looked at Spock enquiringly.

"Please, Jim. McCoy would no doubt rejoice at my predicament, and I am in no mood to further sample his sarcastic comments. I will be recovered following a brief period of meditation, and if you could assist me to my quarters I would be most grateful."

"All right, Spock, if that's what you wish. I understand your

reluctance to have Bones check you over - he can be insensitive sometimes - but I would be happier taking you to sickbay." Kirk released his hold on Spock slightly to instruct the lift to deposit them on deck five.

"Jim, I thank you for your concern, but please believe that I will be recovered following a short rest. It has been a traumatic day, and I am rather tired."

The lift came to a halt, preventing Kirk from further comment, for which Spock was grateful. He did not refuse when Kirk offered a supportive arm, and they stepped out into the busy corridor.

They had reached Kirk's quarters when he felt Spock's body go rigid once more. They received several inquisitive glances from passing crew, and Kirk rapidly thumbed his door release and gently but firmly guided the Vulcan inside.

Spock welcomed the sanctuary of Kirk's quarters after the crowded corridor; he sank down thankfully on the side of Kirk's bed and attempted to reassert order upon his tired mind and body. He heard Kirk moving around in the outer office, then the clinking of glasses followed by the heady aroma of alcohol. He looked up as Kirk approached with a glass in each hand. "Jim, you know I do not drink..." he began.

"On this occasion you do, my friend," Kirk corrected. Spock reluctantly took the proffered drink and had a tentative sip; the liquid burned the back of his throat. He watched in fascination as Kirk downed his own drink in one go and then sat cradling the empty glass. He looked expectantly at Spock, and in resignation the Vulcan emptied the contents of the glass and shuddered in disapproval at the obnoxious taste.

"What's wrong, Spock?" Kirk asked.

"I fail to comprehend what comfort you receive from such a vile drink," Spock replied. He looked up and saw Kirk's face light up with that special smile he had thought he would never see again.

"Spock, you know very well that when I asked what was wrong I meant what happened to you in the lift. I've never seen you like this before, and I'm worried. Is it anything to do with what transpired between us on Vulcan?"

Spock nodded silently, and Kirk added, "Want to talk about it?"

Spock hesitated before replying, trying to find the right words. "When I thought you had died on my planet, Jim, when I thought I had killed you and you lay at McCoy's side, I wished with all that I had for you to live again, for it to be as it was. Now that you are here, alive and well, I am having difficulty in believing that this is real. I keep seeing your body on the arena floor, with my hands gripping the ahn woon as it slowly strangled you, and I cannot forget that you almost died because of me."

Kirk was deeply moved by Spock's confession. He grasped the Vulcan's arms. "Spock, my friend, what am I to do with you?" Kirk's voice was unusually husky. "I wish I could ease the pain and emotion you have suffered today at my expense. I know it's not easy to forget, but you must try to put it all behind you and try to seek some comfort from the knowledge that I am alive and well and still your friend."

Spock turned his head away. "How can you say that, Jim, after what happened today? I am not worthy of your friendship."

Kirk grasped the Vulcan in such a tight embrace that he was forced to look directly at Kirk, and his body trembled at the sight of such naked anguish etched in the Human's eyes. "Spock! Don't you realise that you are closer to me and mean more to me than any friend I've ever had, and nothing that happened today or may happen in the future will ever change that! I said earlier that you have been most patient with my forms of madness, and if you think that I'm going to let a little madness called pon farr, which you have inherited from your ancestors, come between us, then you are very much mistaken! Now, for your own sanity as well as mine, please forget such outrageous thoughts, quit worrying, and let's get back to normal, please. As you say, it has been a somewhat traumatic day, which I am thankful is almost over."

Spock made a supreme effort to control his emotions for the third time, and he returned Kirk's embrace briefly. "Thank you, Jim. I also value our friendship, and I will endeavour to do as you ask, but it will not be easy."

"I never said it would be easy, Spock, but please remember I am here to help should you need me. After all, what else are friends for?" He forced a smile, trying to lessen the tension in the room. "You were right, Spock. If we'd gone to sickbay McCoy would be in his element at all these emotions being displayed."

"Indeed, Captain," Spock began as he stood, ready to leave. He suddenly swayed dizzily, and Kirk gently pushed him back down onto the bed, his retort about McCoy forgotten.

"Where do you think you're going, Mister?" Kirk asked.

"I was endeavouring to go to my quarters to meditate, Captain, but my body does not seem to want to comply with my request."

Kirk looked at Spock's tired, drawn features and swung the Vulcan's legs onto the bed, forcing him to lie down.

"Jim, this is your bed. I cannot stay..." Spock protested.

"You will stay, Spock, and count that as an order." Kirk pulled Spock's boots off, and when he encountered no resistance, pulled the coverlet over the supine form.

"Jim, please," Spock tried once more. "We need to talk. There is still so much..."

"By the grace of guardian angels who look after starship captains, we have all the time we need to talk, Spock. But later - right now your body needs the rest it would not receive through meditation, so get some sleep."

Spock obediently closed his eyes, too exhausted to protest further, and as Kirk dimmed the lighting to a softer glow, Spock fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

Several hours later found Spock awake and completely refreshed, and for the first time in several days his mind and body were free from the raging desires of pon farr. He felt an inner peace within

himself. He lay flat on his back, eyes closed with hands steepled together over his chest, and basked in the luxury of meditation. He reviewed the events of the previous day, thankful that he could now judge his actions perspective, although it was still painful to linger over the memory of the fight with Kirk - a fight which had occurred when T'Pring had chosen the challenge instead of the marriage.

His thoughts turned to T'Pring and Stonn, and he wondered if they would find the inner contentment they sought in forthcoming years. As for T'Pring herself, Spock no longer regarded her as anything but another enigmatic Vulcan female; all desire for her had vanished when the challenge was issued.

His thoughts turned to Kirk, and he remembered the joy and relief he had felt on hearing Kirk's voice in sickbay after he had beamed back to the Enterprise to face a court martial - or so he had thought. He had been so pleased to see Kirk alive that the emotional display had occurred naturally. How McCoy had enjoyed the betrayal of his inner feelings! Spock had long ago acknowledged the special friendship he shared with his commanding officer, and no longer denied to anyone - least of all himself - that he shared a close kinship with this one Human who belonged to a race Spock found completely illogical. He remembered the discussion they had had the previous evening; the words Kirk had expressed over their friendship, words that Spock had needed to hear at that moment. He also remembered how contented he had felt as Kirk had fussed over him just before he had fallen asleep.

A bleeping sound suddenly shattered Spock's concentration. He opened his eyes and discovered that he was still lying on the bed in Kirk's quarters. He located the source of the sound, which emitted from Kirk's chronometer as it displayed the time 06.50 hours. Spock was somewhat startled to discover that he had slept throughout the previous evening and most of the night.

He was due on the bridge at 08.00 hours, so he swung his legs over the side of the bed and noticed the sleeping figure of Kirk lounged in an easy chair, his feet resting on the edge of the bed. The alarm had not disturbed Kirk, and Spock silently studied the Human's still form, not wishing to disturb his slumber. Kirk's head rested on his right shoulder, and as usual his hair was displaced and tousled over his forehead. He wore his white towelling robe, which lay partly open, revealing the healing scar. A book lay face-down on his lap where it had fallen when Kirk had finally succumbed to sleep.

The bleeping of the chronometer sounded once more, and this time Kirk heard the insistent call. Spock reached over to deactivate the alarm as Kirk came fully awake.

Rubbing his hands over sleep-filled eyes, Kirk asked, "What time is it?"

Spock supplied the answer, and Kirk stood up to stretch the kinks out of his body. The book fell to the floor but Kirk ignored it as he suddenly winced in pain. He placed his hand on the sensitive area.

"Oh, my neck! It feels like I've just received fifty nerve pinches, all at once!"

"Indeed, Jim," Spock answered dryly. "That is the price you pay for allowing members of your crew to sleep in your bed."

"Well, if that's all the thanks I get, remind me to boot you out of my quarters the next time," Kirk replied reproachfully, but his eyes twinkled teasingly, belying his comment.

"Perhaps that would have been the appropriate course of action last evening, Jim." Spock's tone was not teasing as he continued, "I regret being the cause of your discomfort, Jim, and I ask forgiveness for the pain and injury I have inflicted upon your person during the last twenty four hours."

Kirk squared his shoulders and fastened the bathrobe around him securely to hide the scars of the previous day. "Spock, please stop this self-recrimination over what has happened. We discussed this last night. The scratch on my chest is healing and doesn't even cause me any discomfort, and as for my stiff neck, that's a consequence of sleeping at an awkward angle, and though you may blame yourself, my friend, I do not. You were in no condition last night to go as far as your own quarters, and if I chose to give up my bed for your benefit, that is my concern. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear, Captain."

"Good. Now, my friend, how do you feel this morning?"

"I am quite recovered, thank you, Jim. I concede that a full night of undisturbed sleep contributed to my recovery."

"So my stiff neck wasn't in vain after all!" Kirk smiled, and Spock nodded in acquiescence. "Now, Mr. Spock, I suggest we get dressed with alacrity and go have breakfast before turning our attention to the problems of the day. I, for one, am quite hungry."

Fifteen minutes later they entered the crowded recreation room and lined up behind several crew members waiting to order breakfast. The rec rooms were always crowded at this time of the day as everyone sought sustenance before relieving the crew of night duty at their respective stations.

The queue dispersed quickly, and soon Kirk was holding a tray of food he had selected. He scanned the room and saw two vacant seats opposite McCoy and Scott. He moved over to the table, closely followed by Spock.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he greeted them, placing his repast on the table. Pleasantries were exchanged and Kirk sat down, wincing in pain as he jarred his neck.

McCoy noted the delicate way Kirk favoured his neck and commented, "What's the matter, Jim? Has Spock been attacking you again with the nerve pinch?"

Kirk gave McCoy a withering look as he took a sip of his fruit juice. "As a matter of fact, Bones, I slept at an awkward angle last night."

"Who with?" McCoy retorted. "Not our bachelor First Officer here, that's for sure!"

Kirk directed a sideways glance at Spock and a smile appeared on his lips. "Not quite, Bones, but you're not far from the truth."

He was saved the embarrassment of answering further questions from McCoy as Uhura approached the table.

"Good morning, Captain, gentlemen," she said. "Sir, these messages arrived for you yesterday, but I forgot to give them to you in the excitement of Mr. Spock's marriage. I'm sorry, sir, and I hope they contain nothing urgent."

Kirk quickly glanced through the tapes before smiling reassuringly to Uhura. "It's all right, Upenda, they are all personal messages. You're forgiven this time."

"Why, thank you, sugar," she replied in a lilting voice, and Kirk laughed. She turned to leave, but as an afterthought asked, "Oh, Mr. Spock, I trust that all went well with your ceremony yesterday? Your wife is very beautiful, sir."

An uncomfortable silence followed Uhura's statement, but Spock quickly recovered and said,

"Thank you, Lieutenant, but I am afraid that the ceremony did not go quite as planned. T'Pring and I were not suited to each other, and we have decided to go our separate ways."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, sir, but I am pleased to know that you will be remaining on the Enterprise. Well, if you will excuse me, I'll see you on the bridge later."

McCoy waited until Uhura was out of earshot before commenting, "Boy, you certainly handled that well, Spock! 'The ceremony did not go quite as planned'! You can certainly say that again!"

"Quit teasing, Bones. This isn't the time or place for one of your verbal contests with Spock. Besides, I'm trying to read my correspondence in peace."

"Sorry, Jim, and I apologise to you also, Spock. It was thoughtless of me."

"That is quite all right, Doctor. I expected nothing less from you."

"Why, you..." McCoy bit back his retort when he received another withering glance from Kirk.

Scott took the opportunity to have a few words of his own with the Vulcan. "Mr. Spock, I would like to apologise for our misunderstanding in the transporter room yesterday. Dr. McCoy has explained the facts of your visit to Vulcan, and I would like to say how sorry I am about what happened, and you can rest assured that the news will go no further."

"Thank you, Mr. Scott. As I have already been informed today, there is no need to apologise for what has occurred, though I do appreciate your sincerity."

Spock glanced at Kirk, wondering if the Captain had understood the meaning behind his words, but Kirk was lost in thought as he read the last message. He took another sip of his fruit juice, and almost choked when he read the contents of the message.

"Jim! What is it?" McCoy asked, concerned, but Kirk was unable to reply because of the coughing fit which he couldn't stop. Tears poured down his cheeks, but eventually the coughing subsided until all that remained were slight hiccuping sounds as Kirk tried to get his breath back.

He smiled weakly at the concerned faces of his officers. "Sorry about that, gentlemen," he said between hiccups. "I've just had a bit of a shock, that's all."

"Would you care to share your news, Jim, or is it too distressing?" McCoy asked.

"Oh, it's distressing, all right, Bones, but not in the way you mean. I've just been invited to be best man at Commodore Garrett Saunders' wedding!"

Kirk's news was received with a pair of raised eyebrows and two shocked faces. The three Humans stared at each other in disbelief for several seconds, and then started laughing until they couldn't stop. Spock's eyebrows rose even higher. Crew members looked on, surprised, but they too soon began laughing along with their senior officers, completely unaware of what they were laughing about. Order was eventually restored, but Kirk's hiccups had increased in intensity.

"What are you going to do, Jim?" McCoy asked, wiping tears from his eyes.

"I haven't figured that one out yet, Bones, but one thing I am sure about is that if the bride glances in my direction just once during the ceremony, I'll be out of that wedding quicker than you can say 'Koon-ut-kal-if-fee'!"

Scott and McCoy were still chuckling as Kirk and Spock headed for the bridge. It was 08.00 hours, and their turn to mind the store.



Said the Admiral in a wire,
I am calling to enquire
If you might have any need
For a crew that's gone to seed?
Some may say we're getting older.
I insist we're merely bolder.
And I'll say it still once more
We'll go where no men's gone before.

M.E.B.

≈ THE THREE OF US ≈

When I look at the two of you,
 for one split second I envy you
 that invisible current of understanding
 that flows between you;
 and yet I'm attracted by that current
 for reasons unknown.
 When I came aboard,
 you were friends already,
 but I did not remain a stranger very long.
 Both of you offered your friendship
 in your very own way.
 Jim coming forward and meeting me
 with a smile and open welcome.
 The Vulcan reticent, withdrawn,
 and yet I learned to see behind the mask you wear.
 The lifting of your eyebrows that can mean so many things:
 amazement, amusement, reproach, and even a silent challenge.
 Yes, my Vulcan friend, I know you enjoy our little sparrings
 at least as much as I do.
 It's one way of expressing your friendship.
 Only very rarely you let show your concern and affection,
 but show it does:
 in your eyes, in your voice, and once or twice
 your hand upon my shoulder.
 With Jim friendship just comes natural.
 We are confidants to each other.
 We share joy and happiness, and,
 more often than not,
 trouble and pain as well.
 The two of you, in a way, have come to replace
 the family I lost so long ago,
 and the ship - yes, I'll admit it -
 has become home to me.
 I hope I will never lose this again.
 To lose either of you...
 the thought is enough
 to make me shudder.
 I don't think I could face it.
 We need each other,
 and I know you both know it.
 With you two
 it's almost a kind of symbiosis.
 When one of you is lying down here,
 the other is haunting Sickbay,
 cannot find rest until the other is well.
 Yet each of you is willing to die for the other.
 But could either of you go on living
 without the other?
 I'm not sure, and frankly,
 I don't want to think about it now.
 I only hope that when our time comes
 Fate will be kind and claim
 the three of us together.
 But for as long as we last,
 we'll not dwell on the past
 but be looking forward
 to each new morrow
 among the stars.



EXODUS



by

Linda Bryant



Captain Kirk awoke in a cold nightmare. That klaxon was used for one purpose only, and outside of Starfleet Academy exercises never repeated. The computer voice was counting down.

"Abandon ship. This is not an exercise. Reactor mass critical. Fifteen minutes to detonation!"

Kirk, totally awake, reached for the override button. It did not work. Spock had the watch on the bridge - whatever could have happened? He had to get to the bridge, but first he worked through the procedures deeply implanted with that klaxon call. He leaned to the screen, establishing full identity - fingerprints, voice print, retinal pattern. He checked the items on display, completing the orders.

Captain's safe contents: encoded; enveloped; released.
Destruct.

Captain's log: encoded; enveloped; tagged. Released.

Captain's override: autodestruct sequence. Abort.

Ship's log: encoded; enveloped; tagged; in buoy. Countdown to release activated. Confirmed.

The computer voice chimed in, "Abandon ship. This is not an exercise. Fourteen minutes thirty seconds to zero."

Kirk cut out the sound; he could not hear himself think. He moved swiftly to the door, to find his exit blocked by an exosuit. Clammy, his fingers stiff in his haste, Kirk climbed into the suit. He looked at the screen, which was now bearing the countdown and the legend,

"Abandon ship. All personnel to assigned life modules. Thirteen minutes, 2 seconds to zero."

Kirk hit the door release. He had to get to the bridge, to Spock. What the hell had happened?

The Enterprise was close to the passageway to Beta Ceti. It was part of a solar type system in this galaxy, and their last mission had been to penetrate an unusual gas ion storm and destroy a single large comet whose path would mean it was drawn into collision with Beta Ceti. The Enterprise had completed her mission; the comet was now a meteor shower, and although damaged in action the Enterprise had been safe, her shields under repair and on her way to the Beta Ceti passageway when Kirk had left the bridge to get some rest.

The corridor was full of running crew. Kirk, with the speed and

determination of the obsessed and oblivious of all else, fought his way to the bridge. Spock and Uhura were the only officers there.

"Captain, abandon ship sequence activated. Permission to use science station to help Mr. Scott in auxiliary control?"

"Commander." Kirk nodded and took the con. "Uhura?"

"Mayday automatic mark and rescue buoy located and streamed."

"Uhura, thank you. Close and go to your shuttle now."

Uhura grabbed the exo suit which automatically presented itself as she closed down the communications console, and left at a run.

Spock barely acknowledged Kirk. The captain consigned the status and countdown to the top left hand corner of his screen and studied the log report. Scott was in auxiliary control. Spock had tied his science console in and he and Scott were battling with the emergency reactor shutdown sequence.

Spock cut in, "Mr. Scott, I have control. Radiation in your area is reaching red level. Go to your life shuttle now."

"Mr. Scott, that is an order," Kirk chimed in. Scott was already suited, and his expression confirmed all Kirk had expected but hadn't had time to absorb. "Good luck, Scotty. Kirk out."

Kirk's mind screamed *NO! Not his ship!* He read the report on the screen. It was classified MICRA, a maximum incredible accident. The Enterprise had cleared the meteorite field. Scott had lowered a shield to clear away debris fouling the starboard engine nacelle. A rogue meteorite had appeared counter to the field, charged through the nacelle, holed the exit grid into the main transmission chamber and gone through the chamber's shields. The drive chamber was heavily shielded and it had stopped at the neck of the matter/antimatter chamber. It was held there, but the flow of radiation had flooded the ship's pile, which had immediately gone critical. Radiation had devastated three levels before automatic life support systems had contained it, but power was lost to all systems. It was not possible to regain control of the pile, and there was only one viable action - to abandon ship. The Enterprise was a Terran ship, and this was written in Kirk; no Human crew would ever accept that there were no possibilities, even in the knowledge that in space the life shuttles rarely did more than prolong the long, cold and lonely end.

Kirk looked at the readout. The time was now 10.03; to his eyes it seemed to hold, then to fluctuate. 10.02.

"Spock?"

"Captain, we shall have to leave now."

Spock completed entering a sequence into the computer out of his head. He did not check the computer's calculations or his own input, but shut the console down. An exosuit banged his knees as it popped out. Without moving his eyes from Kirk's Spock grabbed the suit and got into it. He moved to Kirk.

"Come."

He read the reaction he had always known would be there. Kirk intended to go with the Enterprise to her end.

Spock reached out and applied the neck pinch, then carrying Kirk took the emergency chute from the bridge to the torpedo bay. He stopped their slide by the new emergency life raft torpedo, set the charges, pushed Kirk in and fastened the restraining catches. He pushed himself into place as he had intended, his body protecting his captain's, and blacked out as the torpedo sped away from the Enterprise.

In the shuttle loading bay it was as organised as a drill. Dr. McCoy, in charge of evacuation, had muted the alarm signal and left only the flashing countdown. Each of the shuttles was involved, linking with cargo pods which instantly converted to life-saving modules, their contents jettisoned like so much rubbish. The crew members were loaded on.

Sulu commanded the Galileo, with Christine Chapel. Patients from sickbay were accommodated in the shuttle. At 12 minutes to detonation the Galileo was linked, closed up and ready to go.

Uhura commanded the Columbus with Lt. McNamara, Scott's deputy. She checked the linkage as Lt. McNamara warmed up the engines. The crew was shocked by the emergency but accepted the cramped conditions, each person being strapped sitting with bracings at thighs and ankles on the sculptured floor of the cargo pod. Uhura was 36 seconds behind Sulu in closing up.

Scott hurried into the loading bay. M'Benga and Ensign Robson had the Copernicus ready. Scott climbed in and took his place as pilot.

Dr. McCoy saw Chekov signal to him from the bridge of the Da Vinci. He did a final check on the approaches to the shuttle bay and on the readouts. The Enterprise was dead in space, all levels without life support. Dr. McCoy shut down the shuttle bay, set the hangar doors for automatic, mechanical decompression and climbed into the Da Vinci.

The shuttle bay seemed to grow colder, darker, as it depressurised and the exit doors opened slowly to space. The Galileo left first and banked at 67 degrees, the Columbus followed and wheeled off at 226 degrees, the Da Vinci at 35.5 degrees and the Copernicus at 293 degrees, each at 20-second intervals. The four shuttles assumed maximum escape velocity, flying in an arc away from the Enterprise.

Kirk woke first. He was aware of movement, of G-force, of restraints and absolute blackness. He tensed, about to scream, for this was the oldest of nightmares, that of being buried - or in this case being fired in a torpedo - alive. At a different level he was aware of being cushioned, of his exosuit helmet, and with an effort he shut his mouth, relaxed his vocal cords, took a deep breath and told himself to take control and think.

He tried all his limbs, feeling the precisely positioned restraints. He pushed, and trusting to a movement ingrained in basic training, freed his hands. He sensed another body, larger, heavier

than his. Spock.

How often, in reality, in dreams and in nightmares had he woken in strange surroundings to find Spock? And now in this death, Spock. The mind picture completed itself. Was this alien indeed his shadow?

Memory returned with his grin. Kirk raised his head and switched on his helmet light. He was in a large casing tube. Spock and Chekov had designed this modification of the torpedo along the lines of the Apollo design spacecraft, and bullied Starfleet into letting them build one as an experimental emergency life vehicle, but it had never been tried.

The Enterprise. He looked at his chronometer. She would have blown, gone...

No, don't think of that. Think of the present.

Well, it had worked. The movement was slower. He must have come round when the G-force lessened as the burn ended. He released the other restraints and felt low on Spock's chest for the Vulcan's breathing and heartbeat. He couldn't feel anything...

He grinned to himself. *Watch your disorientation. Don't panic, Jim. Remove your glove and try again.*

Warmth and movement and a ridiculously fast heartbeat. Spock.

Kirk remembered the specifications and turned to the screen above his head. He activated the capsule's systems. All parameters were in the green, so he set for automatic status and life support. Slowly he became aware of a humming noise and some pressure, and checking for clearance removed his life support helmet, turning it off.

He leaned over and turned off Spock's suit, removing his helmet. Spock's face was cold and damp and he was unconscious. Kirk frowned and reached for the mediscanner. It was calibrated for him; he switched channels and found the setting for Spock - good, he wouldn't have to reset it manually. He ran the scanner over Spock, watching the screen for interpretation of the readings. Spock was in shock, with pressure bruising to shoulders, abdomen and ankles. Kirk set the exosuit to compensate, and cradling Spock so that he would know when he became conscious lay in the circle of light from the viewscreen and concentrated on absorbing the information recording their escape flight.

It was brief; navigational, G factors, radiation, fuel burn and reserves and life support. They had life support for fourteen hours, but soon must complete a critical manoeuvre to bring them into the Beta Ceti passageway before launching the life support pod and jettisoning the torpedo.

He felt Spock stir and subconsciously push his head into a more comfortable position on his shoulder. The screen registered that he was sleeping, and that was the best thing for them both at the moment. He set the monitors and settled to sleep.

The buzzer sounded and Kirk moved to shut it off. Spock had woken too, instantly alert.

"What is our status?"

"Stable. Two hours before we need to burn the boost and launch the life pod."

"The Enterprise?"

"Must have gone, but I could find no trace of her destruction."

"Let me see the data."

Kirk activated the recorder. Spock concentrated then re-ran it, analyzing the automatic course control, fuel consumption and radiation fluctuations.

"There is no trace of the Enterprise breaking up on that tape."

"She may not have gone?"

"The odds are... No, Jim - this was the end. However, we are on course and should reach the Beta Ceti passageway."

Kirk sensed the tenseness behind Spock's silence and felt him retreat into tight control as the Vulcan considered discussing the possibility of the rest of the Enterprise's crew surviving. The odds were quite good, but he hadn't expected Kirk to take it so well. Was the Human fully functional? He caught the tune Kirk was humming and glanced at him, caught off-balance in a way he had not been for years. Surely that was the one about two astronauts caught in a Jeffries tube Kirk was defiantly humming? Would he never understand Humans? Kirk caught his look and smiled openly in sudden understanding.

Spock rechecked the co-ordinates of the boosters. They strapped back into position for the blast. Prepared, they felt the forces and were buffeted by the noise, but remained conscious. They registered the separation from the torpedo and the rundown of momentum; finally they were floating, only the frail fabric of the life support raft between them and space.

Aboard the Galileo it seemed the longest and most uncomfortable flight anyone could remember. Their escape route took them above and round the Enterprise's course and exited into the Beta Ceti passageway. The explosion of the Enterprise would expand the ion storm, and debris would catch up with the relatively slow-moving shuttles.

At 8.80 minutes out a storm battered the shuttle. Sulu fought for control, flying blind. All aids were distorted and useless. The cargo pod shuddered from a number of direct hits. Sulu sensed when the port engine mounting was damaged, and compensated for the changed trim, but the cargo pod bucked wildly with the resonance transmitted through the linkage. It was a great relief when the Galileo finally broke into clear space. Sulu set the shuttle on autopilot and went with Christine Chapel to check the ship and crew.

Chapel checked the patients from sickbay. All were alive, but shaken, and she reset life support systems. She smiled reassurance and followed Sulu to the cargo pod.

Sulu entered the airlock in the linkage and turned up the

lighting and life support systems to the pod. It was an incredible sight. At first the crew was not aware of him. Chapel joined him and they began to move among the shocked crew.

Some individuals responded and began to help them as the shock wore off and training reasserted itself. They moved down the rows, sorting out those who were injured, mostly from broken restraints. Satisfied that discipline would hold, Sulu left Christine Chapel to care for the injured and went back to the bridge to repair communications and navigational equipment.

The Columbus was caught at 8.82 minutes out. The storm broke around her and on the shields a charge built to a miniature Van Allen field. The bridge was lit by the yellow and green flares of electric discharge. Blinded by the light, irradiated by static electricity and defeated by discharges Uhura battled on as Lt. McNamara fought to reset sensors that were continually popping from overload and fouling the air with the stench of burnt plastic.

At last Uhura's senses cleared and she was aware that the Columbus had made it into clear space. She left Lt. McNamara to stabilise the shuttle and hurried to the cargo pod.

There was a horrifying smell of burned flesh in the cargo pod. Pale sweaty faces looked at Uhura as she turned the life support to maximum. The lighting on the port side brightened and stayed on, that on the starboard side failed, but not before she had seen the path of the lightning that had flashed across the pod through damaged shielding.

Quickly she assessed the problem. The crew members were the best in Starfleet, but would they break discipline faced with this? She opened the PA system and in a quiet, controlled voice gave her orders.

"Port rows 1-3 please report to me. Rows 4-6, please release your straps and start checking routine."

The crew from rows 1-3 seemed unharmed. Uhura set them to check the starboard units 7-9. Of 24 crew in these rows, 3 were dead, 3 seriously burned and 7 had flash burns. The dead were sealed in body bags and the injured settled in care units in the Columbus. The action seemed to pull the crew together and Uhura returned to the shuttle.

Shortly afterwards she opened the communications channel to the hold.

"Attention please. We are on target in the Beta Ceti passageway, and I am in contact with a communications buoy to Starbase 6. We are also in contact with the Da Vinci, and will rendezvous in a few hours. When Starbase 6 gives me details of our rescue I will tell you. Uhura out."

The Da Vinci with Chekov and Dr. McCoy was caught by the storm at 8.84 minutes. Chekov had watched its approach on the sensors. The shuttle was heavily protected at the front and he activated visors and shields as he lined the Da Vinci up with the calculated course of the storm. It was a brilliant tactic. The shuttle was

carried with the storm and buffeted, but was held in a position relative to it. Chekov was puzzled that their course did not vary from that calculated - there were no surges of varying intensity that he had expected as a result of the Enterprise's demise.

The Da Vinci hit the barrier and he applied helm and thrusters to bring them into clear space. The shuttle was on target and undamaged. Chekov contacted the marker buoys and Uhura in the Columbus. McCoy moved back to check the crew; there were no problems, and Chekov's report praised everyone's morale.

The Copernicus was hit at 8.86 minutes out. Scott had noticed the front, knew they could not escape it, but nursing every vestige of power from the engines ran for it. The ion storm hit and enveloped them. At this point it was expanding and pushing them out. Scott held the helm and let the power rip. Feeling the strain on the frame he almost felt the Copernicus bend, then the drag began. He initiated a jump through the barrier and the shuttle emerged in the correct orbit.

Copernicus had not come through unscathed. Scott had used up most of the fuel reserve and there was some meteorite damage, but the ship was intact. M'Benga went to check the crew; there were some minor injuries but no serious problems. Scott reset the communications and tied in with the Columbus and the Da Vinci; they would rendezvous in about four hours.

The faint glow from the torpedo casing ebbed as it disappeared below their horizon. They were immediately aware of the chill, of the purple dark with its faint luminescent flares of distant stars, of the vast immensity of space. They felt attraction and repulsion, for this was to them a place to belong, but not a home.

Kirk moved and the pod changed shape as it set up its own response to his movement. They were weightless, suspended; in a way it was the worst kind of sensory deprivation. There was no up, no down, no front or back save that which they retained in themselves.

Kirk smiled, remembering the instructions to the first astronauts, who were told to think of themselves as a hot water bottle in bed - with the screw top to the head and the ridged back to the mattress the hot water bottle was less likely to leak. He grinned to himself. It was a good job Vulcans had few orientation problems with weightlessness - he couldn't explain the illogic of that, but the analogy worked.

Kirk sailed the drogue anchor which acted as a communications net and stabiliser. Spock began tying in the outside sensors to maintain life support and to activate the communications buoy. After a few minutes he stopped, holding himself rigid as if he was uncertain what to do next.

Kirk grabbed his shoulder and eased him back. "Spock, tell me what's wrong." He shook him. "Spock?"

Spock lay back for a moment, his eyes shut, his face still. "All is well. We are on course. I have contacted the passageway buoy. We have 12 hours life support in reserve. I estimate Starbase 6 should reply to our emergency message in 2.32 hours. I suggest we

rest."

Kirk had been monitoring the readouts as Spock worked. He recoiled at Spock's words - why, now, did he have to raise the Great Wall of Vulcan?

"Spock, I'm not going to rest until you tell me what's wrong."

"I will be better for rest."

"Spock, please explain what's wrong, my friend." Kirk spoke with sudden certainty. "We need to talk this out. Is it some problem you face as a Vulcan?"

Spock was very still. There had only been one other occasion when Kirk had directly put pressure on him not as a person but as a Vulcan.

Kirk shut off the dim interior light, and in the velvet dark of space light reached towards Spock, gripping his shoulder. "I know you don't want to talk at the moment, I guess you hurt too much, but... I need reassurance too."

Spock suddenly lowered his barriers and pulled Kirk's hand to his face, reaching out to him and positioning his hands on Kirk's face to establish a meld. This was not the gentle, warm intrusion to his mind that Kirk was used to receiving, and for a moment he wondered if they had failed to make contact. This seemed totally alien, totally Vulcan.

Kirk didn't realise that in wanting to help Spock through the meld his was the intrusion into Spock's mind. He experienced a subtle change in his perceptions: colours changed to a lower, redder register and his focussing was a deliberate, controlled function; his muscles felt more compact, flatter, his body warmer, his hearing sharper, and he could tell where sounds came from. His mind was different; he was aware of many levels of consciousness at once.

This was Spock's mind, but without the warmth of his thoughts. Kirk concentrated. He didn't know how to force the barriers even if he wanted to, but Spock had offered the meld and he sensed it wouldn't take much to get through the barriers which he felt were a defence Spock wasn't sure how to lower.

Kirk recalled the times they had melded not from duty or necessity but for the pleasure of exploring each other's thoughts and reactions. He remembered the last time, a week ago at Starbase 6. He, Spock and Bones had been to a popular musical. He and McCoy had been intent on the performance, caught with the audience in an emotional rapport with the players. Spock had seemed to enjoy himself too, but as usual in the bar and on the transport back to the ship had remained aloof, alone. Spock had invited him back to his quarters, and in response to his tentative enquiries offered to meld. The Vulcan had total recall, and merged his responses to heighten Kirk's awareness of the art. The experience had affected them both deeply. Now Kirk concentrated on projecting his feelings.

Gently but with desperation, Spock pushed him away. "Jim, it is no use. I can't. I must control."

Kirk pulled himself back. "Look, it's me. You can let it go - it doesn't matter. Let me help you. What the hell is wrong?"

He didn't think Spock was going to answer, but he turned to Kirk and in a low, pain-filled voice whispered, "Jim, how do you manage to live with your emotions? You can forget, bury your memories, live now, grieve later, carry on. It's illogical. I'm Vulcan, I am logical. I have to live with my memories, analyse and accept them as part of me, however shaming or painful they may be. You are prepared to accept alien thoughts and ways to yourself, to change, to meld your personality with others without consideration of losing yourself, your integrity, held only by the web of your emotions. I am what I am; all my memories, my actions, logically have to be part of me. I cannot act, I cannot pretend or delude myself. I can only control."

Kirk was still. He searched his mind desperately, not sure he understood the problem except in an emotional sense and wanting dreadfully to reach out to Spock, to comfort, to explain the illogic of faith that was Human greatness. Needing to do something he reached out and gently rubbed the nearer shoulder. Spock did not respond, but at least he wasn't repulsed. Kirk found the words.

"My friend, there is no need. I accept you as you are."

Slowly Spock brought up his hand to rest on Kirk's. Both lay in a companionable silence as gradually Spock relaxed. Kirk allowed himself to relax too. He wasn't sure he knew what was bothering Spock, what had disturbed him so deeply, but Hell, for that perfectionist, logical Vulcan, wasn't a miracle good enough?

The four shuttles were all within sensor range. Scott programmed the Copernicus computer to compile a report based on the signals from the four ships. Uhura, in the Columbus, kept watch on the communications channel. McCoy in the Da Vinci began a correlation of crew and life support status. Sulu in the Galileo used the navigation and science reports to check their passage and position, passing his information to Chekov for checking.

Uhura was scanning at the limits of their probe when she caught an echo of the Enterprise call sign. Chekov asked if he could take the Da Vinci to investigate, for it could be from the Enterprise's Apollo with the captain and Mr. Spock. Scott agreed - the Da Vinci was in good condition.

Chekov docked his life support cargo pod behind Columbus and took the Da Vinci at an economical speed towards the coordinates Uhura gave him. He whistled excitedly; he was getting a signal in the old Enterprise code from a life support pod. He reported to the shuttles and went in a careful glide on visual towards the contact. It was a life support pod, with the outsize communications drone he had helped design. Careful as his approach had been, the wake of the Da Vinci set it spinning.

"Hell, son, there's no need to go overboard. Stop rocking the boat."

Chekov grinned as he relayed the signal; Captain Kirk at his most terse.

Spock and Chekov worked out a way to tow the drone in, but they would have to suit up and walk to the Da Vinci. In their unknown condition this would be extremely dangerous, and Chekov was concerned that there would be no way he could help or monitor their progress.

As they suited up, Spock spoke. "Jim, if you will permit it, I would like to join us in a directional link. As you know, I am primarily a touch telepath, but there is a way I could link us and assist you for the time we are in free fall. It may cause you some disorientation, but no harm. I do not think you could control your course on your own. As a Vulcan I should have sufficient mental and physical control to do this for us. The meld will be deep, but if you will permit...?"

Kirk swallowed the lump in his throat, understanding that Spock was again offering to risk his life for him.

"Why of course, Spock. You know that I trust you."

Spock concentrated, then moved to Kirk and melded with him. Kirk forced himself to relax, to allow complete domination.

The Da Vinci moved to within a hundred metres of them. Kirk's actions were controlled by Spock as they made a series of precisely calculated thrusts on the suit jets to make contact with the shuttle. Kirk was aware that the journey had exhausted Spock's reserves and tied himself on, pushing Spock into the airlock, then he looked out and felt the first stirrings of space rapture... to stay out... to take off the suit and be at one with the stars... to just drift away...

Through the link Spock called him, moving him into the airlock. As it depressurised he saw Chekov and McCoy bent over Spock. Both turned with a welcoming grin at him.

McCoy took a quick reading and grunted in surprise. "Good - you're okay."

Kirk looked his question.

"He'll be okay too - he's just exhausted." McCoy turned to Spock. "I'm giving you a stimulant and something for the pain, but you are not to move for an hour. Understand?"

Kirk made his way forward and sat next to Chekov as he took them back to rendezvous with the other shuttles. Chekov talked excitedly to his captain, giving all the information, but only part of Kirk took in their escape, the rescue convoy expected in twelve hours from Starbase 6; most of him was unable to take it in, to respond. Chekov retrieved his life support cargo pod from the Columbus and set the Da Vinci on automatic.

"Captain?" Chekov beamed. "A word with the crew?"

Kirk made his way back through the airlock to the cargo pod. The sight there dimmed before the screen of tears in his eyes. Brushing his fingers over his eyes he listened to the cheers and returned the thumps and handshakes. Each contact hit him with its own torture, and he felt like screaming. Gradually a stony mask slipped into place. Quietly, with almost cold control, he turned to the crew and said, "Excuse me, I must get to the shuttle," and fled.

The crew thought he was just overcome - funny, the captain never seemed to mind them seeing his emotion before - but Kirk was screaming inside. *Is this how it is for Spock?*

Dr. McCoy stopped his headlong flight. "Jim? Jim, Spock... Jim, come and settle Spock. Please."

McCoy sensed something was very wrong and pushed him to the rear of the cabin where he had set up his medical unit. Kirk moved towards Spock, barely in control. Spock opened his eyes and silently pleaded for contact. Kirk leaned over the seat and spread his hands for the meld.

\\Jim, the Enterprise?

\\I don't know. Spock?

\\I am recovering.

\\Spock, this link - how do we cope now?

Spock reassured him and relaxed the link further, easing them back. Kirk relaxed, feeling the pressure on his brain and his headache fading. McCoy was at Kirk's shoulder, watching them both, but seeing the tension thought, *I'll consider what's been happening here later.*

A thread of the reason caught him; both had been through a rough experience. He scanned them carefully; their readings were closer to normal limits, the shock was receding. He was distracted by Chekov.

"Doctor, how are they?"

"Both okay, but they need to rest."

Chekov wiped his eyes and tried to control his smile as he met the emotion mirrored in McCoy's eyes. "I know, Doctor," ruefully, "but it is easier for me this way."

McCoy strapped Kirk in the seat next to Spock. "I'll leave you alone until the rescue convoy's in range." He glanced at them. "Do either of you want anything?"

Kirk's face had a look of almost Vulcan control as he checked with Spock and replied almost absently, "No, Doctor. We will be fine."

Subconsciously McCoy noted that Jim had called him 'Doctor', not the usual 'Bones', then he swallowed the lump in his throat as he thought that this might be a time when Jim just couldn't cope. He paused and decided to let them hold on in their own way, but the reckoning would have to come.

In the shuttles standard survival procedures operated, and knowing rescue was coming the crew's morale was high. In another eight hours the arrangements and practice runs for docking with the search-and-rescue vehicles would begin, but now there was time to consider where help was needed. Dr. McCoy had decided he would have to use an exosuit and visit the Galileo. Of the shuttles Da Vinci had come off best; Copernicus was battered and low on fuel, but morale was good; Columbus was well under control; but intuitively he had diagnosed a problem with the Galileo.

McCoy entered the Galileo's airlock, felt the punch of recompression and walked into the shuttle. The difference between the excited and positive approach on the Da Vinci and the silence and aura of suffering here hit him. Sulu seemed deadened, almost zombie-like in his acceptance of his workload - he had been stretched

too far for too long.

Quietly McCoy gave him an anti-depressant. "Well done, Sulu, but let us help now. Set the auto system and get some sleep. I'll wake you when we are in range of the rescue ships."

McCoy sat with him until he slept, then set to work with Christine Chapel in the cargo pod. Chapel had taken care of most of the injuries, but he saw that in her methodical plan she had overorganised herself, and as he moved about just chatting he felt the tension ease. He worked his way back to her.

"Christine?"

"Doctor." She raised dead eyes to him. Flatly she said, "I haven't coped very well with this, have I?"

Dr. McCoy felt a great sadness. "Christine, we can't win all the time. With the sickbay patients and all the injuries here, you couldn't cope. Look, it's under control now - go and get some rest. Your plans worked, you just didn't have enough help. Go back into the pod and see - you and Sulu had too much to cope with, with nothing but determination and grit, right? And I should have seen that your method and Sulu's oriental inscrutibility under stress could lead to this."

Chapel spent a few moments with the crew and came back in tears. She smiled tremulously at McCoy. "Leonard, you're right. Too much control. But it's better now."

Gently McCoy pushed her to a reclining seat. "We have the time. I'll stay. Now get some sleep. I'll need you for the docking transfer."

McCoy went back to the shuttle. He would stay with the Galileo now, but he wanted to talk to M'Benga on the Copernicus. M'Benga asked him about the captain and Mr. Spock. McCoy wished for a holovision link; he had heard the question in M'Benga's voice, and answered on the open channel in general terms.

"Space sickness, isolation, loneliness, responsibilities, guilt, interdependence," and, without a pause, "exchange of personality."

M'Benga considered, and answered the last only. "Possible - we will need to discuss."

With the crew's help M'Benga crossed to the Columbus. He was immediately aware of the crew's high morale. Uhura's crew related well to her, and the injured crew's burns had been adequately treated. M'Benga was at ease with her, but she was in command. It radiated from her, and the Columbus crew basked in a special aura. Lt. McNamara asked if she could transfer to the Copernicus to help Mr. Scott and Uhura concurred - M'Benga would stay and help her with the Columbus.

The Copernicus was in better shape now. The crew responded to Scott's practical approach and the main problems had been dealt with. Lt. McNamara could take over now. Scott explained what still needed to be checked and the reports he was working on. McNamara was

aware of his fatigue.

"Scotty, enough. Go and get some sleep. I'll wake you when we need you."

She promised to go over the four shuttles' reports. Scott leaned back and was asleep before the reclining seat stopped moving.

The search-and-rescue ship Sefton came into sensor range two hours ahead of schedule. Captain Kirk took the call from Uhura when the Sefton patched in communications with Starfleet. It was an open channel, and he did not mention their growing hopes about the Enterprise's status.

Admiral Bright gave details of the rescue convoy and Kirk was relieved to find he would get full support. Captain Jong of the Sefton then discussed procedures for docking the shuttles and facilities for the survivors.

The Sefton came into view, rotating her configuration to allow four integral docking locks to function. The operation went smoothly, each shuttle being encased in a life support membrane framed by the tractor beams holding the shuttle to the mainframe. Sefton turned from a greyhound of space into a milch cow, from search-and-rescue to support.

The Enterprise crew quickly evacuated the shuttles and were welcomed on the Sefton. McCoy, M'Benga and Christine Chapel established themselves and the injured in the sickbay area. This deck was equipped as a field hospital. Scott, Sulu and Chekov liaised with the Sefton's officers to accommodate the crew. Uhura went to the bridge with Kirk and Spock. Captain Jong invited them to use the Sefton's facilities and gave them a small briefing/command room on the main deck.

Uhura established links with Starbase 6. Admiral Bright appeared on the screen. He listened with open amazement to Kirk's report, then he swallowed and tapping his desk for emphasis growled,

"Captain Kirk, for the record I must ask you to confirm that this report is correct. There is no error in the position and effect of the initial explosion?"

"Unfortunately, no. All systems monitors correlate. Admiral, I left fifteen crew members dead from the radiation burst. Commander Spock had the con at the time."

Admiral Bright looked at the steady gaze of the Vulcan Commander. "Commander Spock, can you explain why we have no evidence of the Enterprise's destruction?"

"I cannot, sir."

"That is not a sufficient answer. Goddammit, are you saying the Enterprise may still be out there?"

Kirk moved in. "Admiral, I request permission to go back to the field to investigate."

The Admiral exploded. "When you left the Enterprise, Captain, was the autodestruct set? Yes or no."

"Admiral, the answer to that is classified."

Admiral Bright looked away from the screen. The initial blast was tied to the linkage between the reactor and the matter/antimatter chambers, and only a lightning-quick response from the command console could have saved the ship. Spock was probably the only person on board who could have reacted fast enough. He thought for a moment.

"Captain Kirk, Commander Spock. If this had happened to any other ship in Starfleet I would not believe it. You may consider yourselves dismissed pending my enquiry, but if there is any irregularity you will face court martial. Is that clear?" Then his face changed. "Let me look at your plans to recover the Enterprise. I don't want to lose her, either."

Spock's eyebrows rose, but Kirk grinned happily and transmitted a tape already in the module.

"These are our proposals. I have a list of volunteers for this mission."

The Admiral considered the tape. Finally he returned to the screen. "By all rules you should be on survivor's leave, but I'll log your volunteers and cut your orders. The rescue convoy will stand by for 48 hours to render any assistance. Thank you." He dismissed them, asking to be put through to Dr. McCoy in sickbay.

Admiral Bright eyed Dr. McCoy thoughtfully. "Doctor, do you think they are fit to do this? I know the Enterprise is special, and the relationship between these officers more so, but there are limits to credibility, and this situation is beyond my understanding."

Dr. McCoy nodded his head.

"There are bound to be some problems in reconciling expectations and training with the facts..."

Without any hesitation Dr. McCoy answered the question Bright was trying to formulate. "I'll do a full psychological report as in Starfleet orders, but for the moment it is best to let them work together. I've not noticed any lack of trust, and they are excellent officers."

Admiral Bright looked steadily at McCoy. "Doctor, you too are suspect. I will have to assign a Starfleet psychologist to check your report."

"Yes, sir."

McCoy was pleased Admiral Bright had bothered to explain what was standard procedure, but he was worried. How would an outsider see the unusual rapport between Kirk and Spock and... hell, everyone?

Kirk, Spock and Scott took off in the Da Vinci 12 hours later. They began to search the borders of the ion field for the Enterprise. Her hulk was big enough to give a reading, but it would be difficult to spot. Twice they had density readings which were just eyes of magnetic abnormalities in the storm.

The third reading was positive. Spock homed in on it until he

got a computer-enhanced picture. This was not a whirlpool - the two distinctive arms were in unchanging configuration to the mass. As they drew closer the picture became clear. It was the Enterprise.

The radiation level was too high for them to dock, but they managed to send in a probe. The port engine was intact but the starboard nacelle was missing; the inside strut was breached by a large gash from the initial blast, indicative of structural damage, but Scott didn't think it was irreparable. Spock checked the radiation readings, mainly short-life antimatter debris - the main pile must be intact.

"Captain, it should be possible to board her in 22 hours. It is possible that we will need only to shore up the starboard engine strut before towing her to Starbase 6. The matter/antimatter chamber and shielding will need to be reconstructed, and a new linkage designed, but repair should not take more than five weeks."

Kirk smiled at them. "What are we waiting for, then? Let's go and spread the good news."

The probe was recalled and the Da Vinci headed back to the Sefton.

Kirk was very quiet on the way back to the Sefton, piloting the shuttle automatically. Spock and Scott were intent on evaluating readings from the probe, but Kirk was prey to doubts. How could he tell the crew that the Enterprise could be salvaged, wasn't badly damaged? After their ordeal, after facing death, how would they take it? Would they trust him or the ship again? He looked at Spock and Scott, who were now intent on a plan for salvage.

Kirk docked the Da Vinci and called the crew for a briefing. They cheered, whooped, cried and accepted his word. Quietly he went among them, seeing no doubts, just a regard that this was another case of the luck of the Enterprise, that despite the odds he would see them through. Among his officers he caught the same dedication. To Kirk it seemed almost surreal: the deaths, the danger, the crew's escape; his own escape, and Spock's using historic techniques; a spacewalk guided by spirit and guts; and now this hope of returning home. His mind found the descriptive code for this incident - Exodus.

Kirk looked at the familiar viewscreen from his command chair. The great bulk of the Starfleet tug Trenarth filled it.

"Sulu."

The navigator looked at him, hands and eyes steady.

"Trenarth, ready for pickup."

The reply came back. "Activating tractor beams now."

On the bridge a sigh of exhaled breath was a collective sibilance as the Enterprise dipped, swayed and steadied, nestling into the tractor beams. The impulse engines were maintaining life support and essential services, but the Trenarth's support would be necessary until the starboard strut was strengthened.

"Captain?"

Spock's voice brought him back. Kirk straightened and moved over to the science console, where the Vulcan was monitoring the progress of the ship. "Tow initiated and all systems stabilised."

"Sulu, you have the con." Kirk went to his quarters to get some sleep.

McCoy and Scott suited up and started decontamination procedures in engineering. Both had insisted that this was their job - McCoy because he was responsible for the health and safety of the crew who had died there, Scott because they were his staff. They dragged the portable antigrav stretcher and its load of body bags through the emergency airlock in the sealed bulkhead. The only consolation was that death from high-energy radiation was mercifully quick, but both men knew from the depths of their own experiences the infinity of pain that a split second of awareness could bring. Reverently they lifted the bodies into the sacks, stripping identity, sealing and tagging them into anonymity.

After the third one they returned to place the bodies in stasis. By the fifth load both men were exhausted. Spock must have been monitoring their progress, and he met them.

"Doctor, Mr. Scott, I have set up decontamination for you." He checked them through the procedures. "I will clear up after you and do the required second check on the bodies. Your readings indicate a need for a period of rest."

McCoy reached for glasses and a bottle. It was the best Saurian brandy, but they needed it. He poured two full glasses and dumped them on the desk. In silence they raised them, their eyes meeting in sudden horror. In the bright light of McCoy's office the brandy glowed the eerie green of the stasis units. With a shudder they gulped it down, and McCoy found a different bottle.

A vision of Spock's compassionate gaze flickered across the doctor's thoughts for a moment...

There were more sophisticated metabolic inhibitors, but none which held the same tradition and ritual. Taking by mouth involved one of the most primitive sensory contact areas and basic responses. In grim silence the two men worked to get deliberately, gloriously drunk.

An hour and four bottles later they were stone cold controlled, if not sober. In the way of men they got to the dirty ditty stage as if by removing the normal inhibitions in polite speech they would break the barriers in themselves. It did not release their inhibitions, it just made thinking possible again. With thought came guilt and grief: for Scott, that no matter what, life could not be rebuilt and his engines had gone out of control; for McCoy that he should again have broken his medical oath that none should die needlessly.

Heads on their arms, and taking some comfort in each other's presence, both men cried themselves into a stupor which nature mercifully turned to sleep.

Uhura took the con and stared at the viewscreen, watching the tow. The lights of the tug made it just visible. Every 15 minutes they checked in with the helmsman - as Kirk put it, 'to ensure that neither of you goes to sleep'. Uhura squirmed. At the end of her watch she had to see Dr. McCoy for her psycho Feinberger. Mentally she checked her responses; there was a guilty feeling that she had got off lightly. Would McCoy understand? Of course - but still Uhura worried. Could she have acted differently? Was she at fault in any way? What of her responses? Was there any way she could have prevented injuries when the port shield went down? In communications she had got them through, but that was her job. What about leadership, command? Automatically she answered the call from the tug. Was there anything else she should have done?

Uhura almost panicked. She could not think. Then, suddenly, she began to tremble. Quietly Spock came over to stand by her side.

"Miss Uhura, do not be concerned. You did well, and the crew trusts you." His eyes met hers for a moment, and he gave a small nod. "You may leave for a few moments and get a coffee. I believe the doctor wants you in 20 minutes."

Touched and strangely comforted, Uhura nodded her assent.

Chekov came to take Uhura's place. He too seemed very subdued.

"Mr Spock..." He hesitated. "Is there anything I can help you with? I can tie in the science con to here."

Spock looked at the young navigator. He was one of his best students. Emotional, yes - but as he had just proved, he had a very well-structured intellect and in an emergency could be brilliant. He was a natural leader, and like so many Humans prone to self doubt and illogical quests for what might have been.

Mentally Spock sighed and answered the question that had not been asked. "You did very well. Do not feel guilty because you did not suffer. Be confident - you have proved the Captain's and my trust in you. If you wish you may correlate the shuttles' damage with course vectors and intensity of H bands in the storm."

Eagerly Chekov got to work. Spock eased his shoulders slightly and bent back over his console. Where was Kirk? He could not cope with these Humans...

Uhura returned, talking to Sulu. The oriental's face was shuttered and inscrutable. Spock looked at him and suffered another emotional prompt. Oh no, not another one! He pressed the intercom.

"Captain, can you come to the bridge?"

Captain Kirk arrived, walked over to the science console and stood considering Spock. "Spock, you must take a break."

"Not now, later. I am all right." Control. Spock lowered his tone. "Captain, it is Sulu who most needs a break. Can you take him to the gym and work out with him, or something?"

Kirk gave him a sharp look. "Spock, you need a break."

"Captain, I will finish this in 70 minutes and then I will have a period of meditation."

Kirk watched him for a moment and then reached a decision. He moved to where Sulu was standing watching the tow. "Feel up to a workout with the foils in the gym?"

Sulu nodded, and they left for the gym.

Kirk was a good and experienced fencer, but Sulu was a master. Normally he adjusted his play to accomodate his opponent, but this time he quickly and ferociously beat Kirk. They began again, and the pattern was repeated.

It was six rounds later, and Kirk was beginning to doubt his stamina before Sulu's fencing relaxed enough for Kirk to force a concession. Kirk pressed his advantage and led into a standard set of passes. Sulu followed and they saluted each other.

Sulu dropped his foil and grabbed Kirk's arm. "Thank you, Captain. I needed that."

"Any time," Kirk smiled, then in a different tone, "Don't blame yourself. With all those injured yours was the most difficult situation, and I think you have learned the most important lesson of command - you cannot win every time, and guilt is not the answer when you need to come to terms with grief." He patted Sulu's shoulder. "Go and get it over with McCoy now."

The Enterprise left the dry dock on Beta Ceti III. As she passed the rescue convoy they raised colours in recognition. Captain Kirk set the Enterprise in a standard orbit round the planet and handed control to the passageway pilot. He glanced at the viewscreen. Below them the planet rotated - to the Humans, a strangely reassuring sight.

Kirk moved to the turbolift. The ship's complement was all assembled on the recreational level, for he was going to exercise his right as Captain of a Terran ship and hold a service in memory of the dead, and to the rededication of the Enterprise.

Captain Kirk stood with his officers on the platform. As was tradition he led with the service for the dead. It was moving to watch the others taking their parts, unrehearsed but smooth, each helping the others. Gruffly, but sincerely, Scott read the lesson. Dr. McCoy, doubling as his ancient counterpart, led the final prayer.

"Go forth into the universe in peace, be of good courage, hold fast..."

Kirk's calm was deserting him. The service was moving towards his contribution. Would he, in the few words he could say, be able to show his crew how much they all meant to him?

He walked forward to the edge of the platform. Behind him, on the viewscreen, the Enterprise dipped her colours, lying in stark outline against the planet below.

Dr. McCoy watched him, a light sweat breaking over him. Surely... No, did this man have to show his grief publicly, here and now?

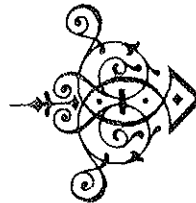
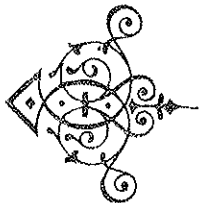
Kirk's voice was lighter, higher than he would have liked, tight with suppressed tears as he took the dedication.

"At the going down of the sun and in the morning - we will remember them."

Scott fired the honours and the Enterprise slowly raised her colours. Kirk looked at Spock; would he... could he...?

Slowly the Vulcan moved forward to stand by him. In a quiet melodious voice he led the reaffirmation of the Enterprise.

"... to boldly go where no man has gone before..."



ONCE YOU BECOME A STAR TREKKER

(Inspired by 'If Once You Have Slept On An Island' by Rachel Field)

Once you become a Star Trekker
You'll never be quite the same
You may look as you looked before you were hooked
And go by the same old name -

But while you work in your office or shop
Your mind will hear a familiar refrain
You'll see the Enterprise in flight - a beautiful sight -
And you'll want to see an episode again.

You'll long to hear McCoy's Southern drawl
And our Vulcan's rapier wit.
You'll laugh into a stupor when you watch the blooper
And you hear Shatner say, "Oh, ****!"

Because once you become a Star Trekker
It becomes more than a TV show
It's the dream of the world in the future unfurled
That stays with you wherever you go.



Linda C. Wood

DEADLY PRIDE



Jim, what else could I have done?
I'm the First Officer, responsible for the ship - as you are.

I couldn't let my personal feelings
Affect my duty, or that responsibility.

When you told me to leave
I never thought you were that serious.

Only afterwards I realised
That you... meant it.

And you still do! It hurts, Jim.
I thought our friendship meant more...

...but now I know
That it's your pride that comes first.

Maybe it is right - in a Captain.
But for your pride, Jim, I lose so much...

I care too much about you
To allow my pain to show.

And if that is what you really want
Then I shall go, silently, the Vulcan mask in place.

McCoy has tried to help, but it is you I need
To come to my side, to ask...

For me to stay. But maybe
Again your pride will be as firmly in control as is my Vulcan half.

Do I actually have to leave
Before you realise what we have?

Once I'm gone, my friend,
I will only come back in time of great need -

And that need may not be yours. Only time will tell.
But for how long do you expect me to wait?

As we approach our destiny
I begin to wonder -

Will you ever come?

Karen Hayden
&
Elizabeth



UNDERSTANDING

by

Gillian Hovell

(from 'Miri' and Glen David's 'Triad'.)

It was still, quite still as Spock came out of the door into the bright sunlit street. It was one of those hot, cloudless August afternoons when the day hangs in the air as if by a thread and the world feels as though creation has held its breath and is waiting, waiting for something... And it was so quiet, this still afternoon - too quiet, too silent for all to be well. The buzzing of a drowsy insect, the faraway cry of a bird, the rustle of a snake in the long, dry grass - there were none of these here. Humans, with their dull ears and lulled senses, could not have heard all that he heard, found as much as he found in the world to delight in, though he would never have admitted it. The simple pleasure of standing still on a hot, calm day, listening and seeing and feeling these things - while the friend at his side also listened and saw and felt - but differently. The day had numberless facets for them to touch... And he wondered how much of the pleasure came from the day, and how much from presence of the friend.

But now there were no sounds, no stirrings or movements. This was a nearly-dead world, a doomed world where the little remaining life would soon snuff out, leaving the place still and silent indeed. And leaving him here alone - alone until the food was gone, alone with the bodies of his friends and the memories of their laughter.

Something inside him cursed the differences that made him strong, that made him invulnerable; he was inviolate, and to no end other than loneliness - always, the reality of this loneliness.

He lifted his head and squinted his eyes against the sun hot on his face. No, there was no sound, no movement... It was all so still, this world which might soon be his alone was so still...

He pulled himself out of his circling thoughts and sighed. He ought, of course, to go and apologise to McCoy for... for what? Snubbing him, not providing the shoulder - or the butt - that he needed for dampening his fear? The doctor was afraid, afraid of dying this death that all but the Vulcan were promised - and afraid of what they might do, under no control of their own, before that death finally overtook them.

He hadn't known McCoy long - something under a year - but he was coming to value him as highly as the very different way in which he valued his captain. McCoy was brilliant, as brilliant as Spock in his own field. Spock had read one or two of the young McCoy's papers out of curiosity, and had been left feeling a little wiser and a lot more respectful; but that field was so far removed from Spock's - or rather, the doctor's way of thinking was so far divorced from Spock's - that it had seemed at first to the Vulcan that their minds would never meet, either professionally or personally. That was beginning to change...

He ought not to have risen to McCoy's irascibility. He should have realised that his was the anger bred of fear. Abrasiveness was a part of the doctor's nature, and to ask him to exorcise it would be like asking Mr. Scott to take up basket weaving. Spock had got the nature of Mr. Scott very early on.

But no, he thought; he had realised what had prompted McCoy's anger. The problem had been that he hadn't known how to cope with it, hadn't felt able to cope with it. He'd had to get out before the other man's natural emotionalism pierced the very tenuous hold he had over his own emotions and started him off on worrying - expressing his worry - pouring it all out to McCoy; his fear for the doctor, for Jim, and for the others... and his blinding fear for himself.

Retreat into isolation was a necessity, a balm to the turmoil of a crowded ship; but to be left alone knowing that there was no-one in the next room if you needed them... He never had but he had known that they were there.

It was ironic, he thought bitterly, that he should be having the problem of ordering his mind - a Vulcan, requiring time to calm his thoughts! But habits long worked at die hard, and Spock was too new at knowing that Humans would accept him for himself rather than some pseudo-Human he presented to them, to have quite eradicated all Human reactions from his behaviour. He had been surprised at just how difficult it had been. The emotions like fury, overt pleasure - these were easy to remove from others' sight. But other emotions - the sadness, the affection, the humour in things - being rooted in himself these were not so easy. It would have been too easy to have comforted McCoy - and so, perhaps, himself - to have taken a last opportunity for a friendship unencumbered by the prospect of life after it, to have given himself something more to sustain him in the aloneness that must follow unless a miracle ensued. It was just that sitting in a comfortable heap with McCoy in the middle of the floor struck him as mildly ludicrous, somehow... Well, it was too late now.

He turned to Farrell, who was standing in the shade of the doorway, and the security guard stepped further inside to allow Spock into the darker coolness.

"See any of them, sir?" Farrell asked nervously, then blushed as he felt his foolishness - they were only children, after all.

"No, Mr. Farrell," Spock replied. "They are evidently well hidden. Which way did the Captain go?"

"The girl took him down there," said the man, pointing down one of the shabby, sunny streets. Then, as Spock showed no particular inclination to move - indeed, he had never really had any intention of going to find Kirk; that had been merely a convenient excuse to get him out of the laboratory and save McCoy's dignity - Farrell continued,

"I... I can't help feeling nervous, sir - and then annoyed because I shouldn't be. They're only a bunch of kids, after all."

Spock, in his half Human, half Vulcan youth, had encountered many children, and knew there was no 'only' about it. "These 'children' are more than three hundred years old, Mr. Farrell. They are hostile to adults and frightened of them; and seeing them as a threat, they will try to be rid of them. They can see us but we cannot see them; they know this area and we do not; most of them are

in no immediate danger of catching the disease, while we already have it..." and I have it as much as any of you, but in different guise "...and they have our communicators. Your nervousness may not be logical, but it is understandable." He was going to add 'in a Human', but stopped himself. The man required reassurance, and anyway, Spock was no hypocrite.

Farrell looked at the Vulcan and wondered how strangers - and even colleagues - could ever think him careless of people. True, he never showed emotion - Farrell thought he probably didn't really feel it, not in the way Humans did - but he knew what it was like, nevertheless. He drew in his breath, trying to dissipate the tension.

Spock made as if to say something more, but his thoughts were smashed aside by a crash, a loud uncoordinated crash and a hoarse, horrible cry from the room behind.

"SPOCK!"

A cry of fear, of despair... of pain.

With horror in his heart Spock knew what had happened, and he turned and ran towards the sound with as terrible a cry in his mind as McCoy had had on his lips.

\Bones, Bones - what have you done?

He hesitated at the doorway, hesitated for just a moment longer than he knew a Vulcan should, then ran to where his friend lay quite still on the floor. He was so still... And he felt the panic, that old familiar panic of the fallible man whose colleagues view him as infallible, well up in him.

What could he do? What was there to do? What if he was dead? He found himself kneeling, found his hand checking McCoy's heart without quite realising how it had got there. Then his eyes fell to the doctor's side, and as he delicately picked up the small instrument of death - where did that thought come from? - it took all the fragile self control still at his command not to crush it in vengeance for the loss of his friend. He pulled the drug container free, and his lips tightened in impotence as he confirmed that it was quite empty. He handed it to Farrell as if it would burn him. But he hadn't been aware that Farrell was there...

And his hand was checking the doctor's heart. Automatic response. What were you supposed to do now? Bones, what have you done?

Check the eyes, yes, the eyes. The shadow crossed his face again and he pulled his mind back into some sort of order. Panicking will not help, and you know quite well that you do not need to panic. Some calm settled over him, and it was only his eyes that were haunted as his hand went up to McCoy's face to check the pupils. He could have felt his mind, could have taken the contact by touching alone, but he did not. He was getting to know Jim Kirk, but this one he did not know, not well enough yet. And now, perhaps...

The pupils were dilated, bright and dark, heavily drugged but not dead yet. In a desperate attempt to find anything which might against all reason tell him that McCoy had... fallen, fainted perhaps - Why do I want him to have fallen? If the vaccine does work... No, he would not think of that, would not entertain the dangerous,

wonderful thought that his friends might not be lost to him after all. It would hurt too much.

Spock was a strange mixture. Not long aboard the Enterprise, no, not long on board the Enterprise with this crew he had learned neither to hide his emotions as efficiently as his Vulcan half wished, nor to accept them for what they were as his Human half demanded. His Human half was always far more demanding, as were his Human friends. If he drew only on his Vulcan heritage he offended, hurt his Human colleagues, and his new fragile friends; and if he drew on any of his Human heritage the Vulcan part of him froze in protest and he felt treacherous, grotesque.

So he had felt when trying to be Human for the sake of those he had worked with before. But the balance required was so fine... And the irony was that it was not in truth difficult to maintain - when alone. But when he found himself touched by friendship, the strange, compelling, sometimes frightening friendship which he had found was becoming a part of himself after meeting Jim Kirk; or the slower to start, uneasy friendship with the doctor, whose acerbity and cutting wit enabling Spock as it did to ride emotion without being swamped by it, was beginning to become as precious to him in its own way, uncertainly at first but now ever more surely as the other - then maintaining both the veneer of reserve and the deeper control became almost impossible. He needed time, time to adjust to this world of strangely understanding people he had found himself in; and time was what this twisting of the universe was not giving him. He could do it if he had time...

He felt McCoy's pulse. It was slow, terribly slow, but it was steady, and its rate did not seem to alter with his holding. And McCoy had said, 'How long do you want to wait?'

Oh my friend, has that decision already been made for you - and for me?

"Is he dead, Mr. Spock?" Farrell's voice cut across his thoughts as if with brute force.

Is he dead? He must not be dead!

His face closed slightly in a gesture of defiance that, in a few months time, he would not feel necessary. Now it helped him to find his voice, helped him to believe the hope behind his reply. "Not yet."

Not yet and not ever - not if I control.

He was hardly aware of his action as he reached over McCoy's still form and pulled his other hand up over his chest, linking it with the one he already held. If he had thought about it he would have rationalised it as 'making him more comfortable', which would have shown just how little rationality he had left to call on. But there was no way of rationalising the need he felt to keep the warmth of the physical contact as he placed his hand over the doctor's and held it there.

A look a little like tenderness crept into his eyes, and he sighed with the... waiting, he supposed. There was nothing more he could do for him, but if McCoy could have known it, he would have appreciated the touch.

If he could have known it...

Farrell had gone, and he was alone with the dying. It had all happened so quickly...

Why? Why did you risk your life for a chance - a chance so dependent not on your brilliance or my competence but on luck? I do not believe in luck...

The imminence of McCoy's death hit Spock and he looked it straight in the eye. Oh, he knew he could master it - but he would be hurt in the mastering. Luck, which he had always claimed he had never believed in, which he was now fervently wishing he could believe in. He could, couldn't he? A lifetime of scorning hadn't soured her, surely? As some turn to God in death, having spurned Him all their lives and now were driven by fear to plead for His kindness, so Spock wished with all his Human half and all his Vulcan half for McCoy's luck and life to hold.

He looked at him again, at the dark raised weals on his face, a thing that Spock could not share and which would profit McCoy little if he could. The courage, the driving force of this man was a love for his fellows, a compassion for all beings, a fierce loyalty to his friends.

How could I ever have expected him not to do it? he thought suddenly. How could I ever have left him...?

No, that was not logical - if he had not left McCoy would have done it anyway, and with a certain triumph in his eyes at that. What was even less logical was the feeling rising in him that he ought to have caught this disease that was killing them. Why should he be immune? He felt obscurely cheated of his part in McCoy's sacrifice. It had not been for him, and he wanted it to have been. He wanted to know that the caustic doctor cared for him, to have that fragile, vital reassurance.

You fool, do you think he differentiated between you and the others when he made the decision? Do you think, indeed, that he did it any the less for you than for the others? And he was right - we are helpless and dying and without communicators, and there is no other way.

His hand tightened on his friend's as he realised that McCoy had done the right, the logical thing, and that he had been too occupied in keeping his calmness intact to see it. He wondered if he would ever have the kind of courage this man had. Maybe, one day...

But maybe if he died now McCoy would have the best of it anyway. Had there been any pain? Yes, there had been pain in the voice which had called out his name - not Jim's, but his - but it had been quick, hadn't it? His vision swam a little, but not so that anyone would notice. Only McCoy could have seen, and McCoy was almost as far from him as he could ever be. Automatically Spock found himself checking that McCoy had not seen, and then felt ashamed - if the doctor had done so, it would have meant he was alive again.

Not yet... not yet...

Yes, perhaps McCoy would have the best of it. The others would die terribly, as the old, old child had died terribly - the memory hurt him physically as he thought of the tricycle which Jim had unthinkingly passed to him, and he to McCoy; but it was McCoy who had looked at it, seen the child and the laughter behind the broken toy, felt the faded touch of things long gone, of children who should have

been dead a long time ago.

Is all our humanity to die with him?

No - but Spock knew with hard, cold thought that if Kirk had to die it must be like this, not like the other. And he... Oh God - was there no end?

As if drawn by his thought - or maybe Spock's mind had been drawn by the presence - he heard a sound and knew that Kirk stood behind him. He heard the door open, the Captain come in "... channel open, clear your computers..." heard the end of a conversation trail off - *The ship - Jim has recovered the communicators and is talking to the ship, and it has all been for nothing...* heard him stop, abruptly, as he saw the two on the floor and took in the meaning of what had happened.

Oh Jim, don't come yet. Not yet. Wait until he has died, wait until there is no more waiting, no more of this kind of hurting. You are too early...

But Kirk came slowly to his friend's side and silently knelt by him. Spock glanced at his face, barely registering its hurts, then looked back to the man lying on the floor. Neither noticed that he was still holding McCoy's hands.

There was a pause which Spock dreaded breaking, but it was Kirk who finally spoke, his voice level, knowing the answer to his question even as he asked it.

"What happened to McCoy?"

Spock forced himself to marshal his thoughts into an order coherent enough to form the basis of an answer. It was not as difficult as he had supposed; Jim's presence, even when no help could be had, was a calming, soothing one. *If this one, too, dies...*

"He injected himself with the vaccine. He was unconscious when I found him."

Not until then did he become properly aware of Kirk at his side, for his attention had been so fully on the dying man at their feet that he had only briefly looked at his Captain - and he didn't look now, not directly - but he felt his hurt, sensed his torn clothing, smelt the blood. Oh, how he sometimes felt cursed by his own acuteness, impotent to help but horribly aware.

Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise - sometimes, he thought, that is true. Why are my friends the ones in danger? Why are they the ones with the difficult tasks to do?

Illogical, at best, but he was angry with the universe for giving him friends and then giving them such burdens to bear. And he knew that he could not lift those burdens from them, for then they would no longer be his friends. Working out your own salvation - was that what it was? And had McCoy's worked out this time? The hands he looked at grew dim again, and he had to fight for control.

Not to break down, not now, not in front of Jim...

But Kirk had shifted his position, moved against Spock's side, and the Vulcan could feel the sudden tension in him. He hadn't noticed any change in the pulse... But it wasn't that.

"Look at his face!" Kirk's voice was hushed and rough with emotion, and Spock felt the irrational and so-hard-to-kill hope dance up in him again.

He reached out to the doctor and turned his head to rest on its side, hearing Kirk's urgency but hardly daring to believe the shadow of joy that underlay it. He felt no need to take his hands away, but cradled the other as a mother might cradle her child, and almost without knowing it began to lend strength to McCoy's healing.

The sores stood out, black and ugly, against his skin, although they were less like sores than huge ugly scabs, growths of cancerous cells where none should be. On anyone they would have been disgusting; on the face of a friend they were obscene. How ironic, that the healer should be thus healed... But this healing was of life, and that was the one disease McCoy desperately wanted to stick with. How ironic...

Then Spock heard his own voice as it were from a great distance as he whispered with the awe of those who have touched the hem of death's garment and survived. "The blemishes are fading." He was puzzled, still too scared of the hurt to believe, his words fading in the wonder of it. "They're fading..."

And the strange thing was happening, the very thing that Kirk, with his less-shocked eyes, had seen first.

I must have been very weary...

The sores were beginning to change, beginning to disappear, layer by layer as the drug McCoy had staked his life on did its work. They were starting to disappear.

And Spock understood, as the marks finally vanished leaving McCoy's skin as clear as before, that his friends were not going to die. He smiled, so dazed that the expression came to the surface almost unmasked, and knew something not far removed from joy as he felt Kirk relax against him with relief, then slowly leave his side to go to the others.

He found that he was weak with the suddenness, the awe of it all. His friends were going to live, to be cured of the plague that had thought to kill them so cruelly, that had thought to kill him; they were going to live, and so was he.

The sense of loneliness that even before being realised had almost choked him receded to its normal proportions. He could cope with it when that size. Never reaching out for those he loved, perhaps, but able always to know that they were there, and to know that they might reach out to him. Spock needed to be needed, and had not yet learned to live either with the knowledge that some people might not need him, nor with the ability to hide his need from others. Both would come easily, in time - too easily, perhaps, for there would be times when even the doctor would react to him as though his surface layer went all the way through. The future is a knowledge not meant for man, and Spock was blessed in having its burden denied him.

He looked at McCoy, still in sleep and his skin growing warmer as the old health returned, and with no-one there to see a shadowy smile crossed his face as he shook his head lightly and tried to rationalise the strange, still-pulsing despair.

"I will never understand the medical mind." *I will never understand what makes my friends so brave, so vulnerable... so precious to me.*

But as he slowly stood in order that when he awoke the doctor should not know who had been holding him, Spock knew that he *did* understand. God help him, he understood only too well.



THE GIFT

When I was young
I shivered with loneliness
and I was starving for love.

My father did not realise
that the ability to suffer
was within me.

My mother did see
but could not say a word -
her cool hand offered comfort, but no help.

Being lonely amongst my own people
my cold heart became numb
and my soul blind.

And the hand of friendship
when it reached out to me
remained unseen for a long time.

Jim, I have done you grave injustice
when I thought you could not be honest
and only out for gain.

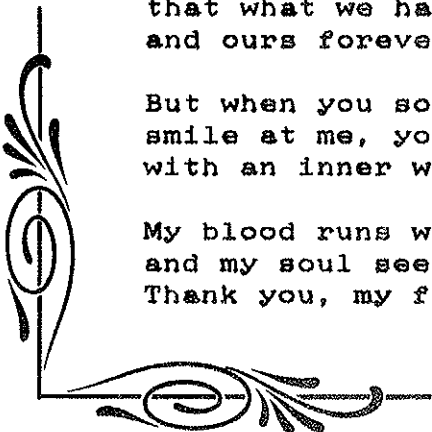
But friendship such as ours
was too beautiful to be true
and I had learned to mistrust beauty too soon.

Even now I cannot quite believe
that what we have is alive
and ours forever.

But when you so openly
smile at me, your eyes shining
with an inner warmth...

My blood runs warmer through my veins
and my soul sees beauty all around me.
Thank you, my friend - for giving me life.

Elizabeth



THE HAMSTRIB AFFAIR

by

Joyce Devlin

There was silence all over the bridge as I entered. The deathly hush enveloped me also and I stood transfixed as the ship slid gracefully into the spaceport of Racal, Starfleet's top rest and recreation centre in the quadrant. I watched as the port flashed its beautiful, welcoming lights on and off in acknowledgement of our arrival.

It was going to be sheer heaven for three whole days - I hoped.

"Docking sequence complete, Captain," Sulu announced, breaking the silence.

"Confirmed, Captain," Spock said as Jim Kirk looked over his right shoulder to the First Officer.

I glanced at Spock, who for once was in complete agreement with yours truly. Jim Kirk needed to get off the ship for some peace and quiet, away from all the paperwork and problems. We all need a break at times, but this time Jim needed it more than any of us; the last few months had been hectic, to say the least, and being C.M.O. it was my job to see that the health and mental stability of the crew remained on the up and up level.

And I wasn't about to be sidetracked this time; I meant business. After all, it had taken me forty eight hours to persuade our dearly beloved Captain that it was for his own good that he take a break immediately (and mine also, for if he found out that those hamstribbs had managed to escape I'd never get him shoreside. Wait till I get my hands on whoever...)

"Let's get you off," I said, rubbing my hands together in front of me. "Right now."

"What's all the hurry, Bones?" Jim asked. "Trying to get rid of me? There's plenty of time, you know." Jim smiled as he sat in the command chair, not budging. The one thing he hated was me railroading him. But I wasn't about to be put off - not now.

"Not for you, there's not!" I remarked. "You either get up off your butt and get going or I put you on a medical - "

Before I had a chance to finish, Jim cut in.

"That's blackmail!" he protested.

The bridge crew must have heard the exchange, but by now they were used to it.

"Captain, I think Dr. McCoy has a point. You are in need of some light entertainment, away from the environment of the ship," Spock backed me up.

"What's this? A conspiracy?" Jim asked as he stood.

"No," I said innocently. "We both think you'd benefit from the three whole days away from the ship." I looked him square in the eye. "I could make it a medical order, Jim," I threatened.

"I know, Bones - that's why I'm going now. Mr. Spock, you have the con. I'll see you in three days, gentlemen."

With that, Jim left the bridge with yours truly tagging along after him like a collie dog. I had learned from experience not to let him beam down with no witnesses to make sure he left.

I was in two minds about letting him go off on his own, but I had those damn animals to find and a departmental investigation to carry out, so I was up to my eyes already.

Well, he was off; I left instructions with the transporter chief to inform me the moment he returned.

So. That was that. I had three days to find those pests of things, or there'd be hell to pay.

I spent two and a half days looking for the hamstribbs (I'd called them that cause they looked like a tribble but were the shape of a hamster.) They were cute - so long as they didn't start biting; they thought nothing of nipping an incautious finger. And there was still no sign of them.

I'd asked the transporter chief to buzz me when Jim requested clearance to beam aboard, and I was hoping it wouldn't be for a while, but my luck had run out; Jim was ready to come aboard with several hours of our time at Racial left.

I made my way from my office along the corridor of Deck 7 to transporter room 2, where our dear Captain was just shimmering into life. Spock was already waiting and I moved to his side.

"Spock, Bones!" Jim said as he stepped down from the platform. "Anything happen while I was away?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary," Spock informed him as we headed out of the transporter room. Well, it wasn't a lie; nothing had happened while Jim was away - it had happened just before he left - but even so I was in a cold sweat in case Spock said anything.

"Bones?"

Jim must have caught the look I had given Spock.

"Sickbay's in order," I reported, fingers crossed behind my back - sickbay had been turned upside down and inside out several times over the last couple of days.

I was too formal - I just knew it. Jim was wearing one of the looks that said it all; he knew we were keeping something back from him.

By this time we had reached the turbolift door and I was sweating. "How was your leave?" I asked as the lift doors opened.

"Fine - and that's all you're getting. Something's been going on, and until I find out, Mister, you're not getting to hear about my

leave. Understood? I'll be in my quarters, Spock."

Before I could reply, the lift had whisked him off.

I turned to Spock. "He's got a sixth sense for trouble."

"He would not be who he is if he did not," Spock replied. "I suggest, Doctor, you find those animals - fast."

I knew he was right, so I left Spock to his rounds and made for my cabin, thinking of a nice long shower and a change of uniform before resuming the search.

Jim, I was sure, had gone off with the same idea - at least, the shower and change part.

I'd only just gone through the door of my cabin when it happened. All hell let loose.

I flew out of the door like a scalded cat, medical kit in one hand, to find that the scream had come from Uhura, who was standing in the doorway of her cabin in her nightgown, with Jim pulling her to him - wearing only a scanty towel round his middle.

"Jim? What the hell - " I began.

"Not the Captain, Doctor - your hamstribes!" Uhura informed me. "Not just the few you lost, either - the room was full of them. When I put the light on, they were everywhere!"

Oh, boy, I thought. Now I'm for it.

"Oh no," Jim groaned as he turned to me. I started to back off - right into Spock.

Trapped.

I stood still, looking cross-eyed at the finger that was pointing at my nose.

"BONES - " Jim growled.

"I can explain!" I said in self defence.

"You'd better be able to," he said in a low voice as he caught hold of his slipping towel.

"Sir, you're dripping," Christine Chapel said as she passed. It only made matters worse for me.

"My cabin, Mister - on the double."

It had been a long time since I'd heard Jim so angry. Obediently, I followed him into his cabin.

Rigidly, I stood to attention as I waited for it.

"Right, Mister - you'd better have a damn good explanation!" Jim said as he swung round to me.

"I'm looking for it," I said. "I'm carrying out an investigation in the department to find out who let them out."

"And it looks like they have been breeding, now doesn't it?" he said gently - too gently. Then he snapped, "Damn it, Bones, why wasn't I told???"

"Because if I had told you, you wouldn't have gone on shore leave," I said quite lamely. My reason was out now, and I waited for the explosion.

It never came.

Jim's attitude changed, mellowed. "O.K., so I wouldn't have gone ashore had I known - but you could have told me once I'd returned." He smiled for the first time since I'd entered his quarters.

"What chance did I have to tell you anything?" I asked, calming myself down a good bit.

"One - in the transporter room - "

"What, in front of Kyle?" I asked, trying not to laugh. Jim thought about it, and had to admit that there had been no real chance to tell him - my reasons for keeping quiet had been good.

"Well, you're here now and you know now," I told him.

"Yes - and what are you going to do about making sure you find them all? I don't want to be up to my neck in hamstribs like I was with tribbles - you catch my drift?"

Of course I'd caught his drift.

I'd brought those things up from a planet survey, but not just as pets; they lived on beetle-like creatures similar to ones that had suddenly appeared and were threatening the crops on Delta 5, where they had no natural enemies. I hadn't realised they bred fast - not as fast as tribbles, thank heaven - I'd just thought that it was worth taking some to Delta 5 to see if they would help the situation. But it wouldn't help if all they did was replace one menace with another!

Just then the intercom on Jim's desk bleeped.

"Kirk!" Jim snapped as he thumbed it on.

"Spock, Captain. I believe I have found more of Dr. McCoy's hamstribs."

Trust that pointed-eared walking computer to accomplish what I had completely failed to do in several days' searching!

"Where, Spock?" Jim asked.

"In my quarters, Captain."

"Be with you in two minutes," Jim said as he turned to me. "Well, don't just stand there - come on!"

"Hadn't you better get dressed?" I asked.

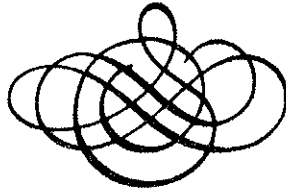
The sight that greeted us in Spock's quarters was one of

sleeping balls of fur - all over the place. It took just under thirty minutes to gather up the sleeping animals and return them to the lab - only to find that the cages there weren't big enough to hold them all. So we knocked up a cage in the cargo hold for them.

Jim was happy; Spock had deduced that the heat in his cabin had acted like the heat on their own planet, and they sort of went into hibernation when it became too hot. He had a fancy word for it - gave me a long explanation about how animals hibernate when it's cold but do this other kind of sleep when it's too hot. But why worry about fancy words? They were asleep and that's all that mattered.

Anyway, it was decided to keep them asleep till we reached Delta 5, which was only about six days away.

Life was slowly returning to some semblance of normality for your friendly country doctor - but for how long, I wonder?



ALIEN DREAMER

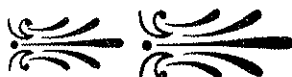
I long to travel 'mongst the galaxies,
Seeing their beauty with my own eyes;
To be at one with the Universe
Is a dream I long to realise.

I long to walk on an alien shore
And feel soft sand beneath my feet;
To hear the cry of an alien bird
And the azure sea's steady beat.

To be warmed by the rays of an alien sun
'Neath a sky of a different blue,
And run fast and free with the wind in my hair
Through foliage of a different hue.

To smell all the scents of another Earth
And hear the alien animals call;
These are the things that I yearn for most,
That I long for above all.

This is the life that I dream of
As I walk in the cold wind and rain;
This is the life that I wish to lead
Should I return to this Earth again.



Linda C. Wood.

WHEN FATES COLLIDE

by

Alinda Alain

"This must end."

"Agreed. The destiny of this Human and this Vulcan, and the destinies of their species, are parallel. Apart, neither will long survive."

"What is to be done?" the Organian asked.

"The two must meet," decided the Metron.

"Such an encounter could be fatal. Neither holds any compassion for the other. Their species are enemies, centuries old."

"True, but if the bond that has always drawn such as these together exists here, they will survive."

"So be it."

They faced each other on the barren, rocky landscape, two lonely warriors, aliens to each other and unaware that the answer to the most soul-consuming questions of each lay in the one before him.

Captain James T. Kirk studied his opponent. Tall, lean of build in the Vulcan mode, his enemy wore a helmet covering most of his alien features. Dressed in black and silver, the Vulcan looked very much the deadly machine of destruction the entire race was bred to be.

Kirk backed away at the Vulcan's sudden approach, the alien's every movement signifying fluid feline grace and power. Cursing, the Human turned and made for the sloping hill of boulders. He was in no condition for this kind of conflict. Only last week had his Chief Medical Officer, Dr. McCoy, permitted him out of sickbay where he had been recuperating from a concussion, severe contusions, cracked ribs and internal bleeding.

Yet he had no choice. The mysterious voice that had frozen the Enterprise in space and whisked him from the bridge had said that this was a duel to the death, with only the victor, his ship and crew allowed to go free at its conclusion.

His feet slipped and he fell, hard, the breath forced out of his lungs. Glancing back he saw the Vulcan closing swiftly, the long dagger already drawn.

So, he would have to make his stand here.

The conflict would be brief, final. He would have only one chance. The superior speed and reflexes of the Vulcan would allow no second chance.

He barely made it to his feet before the Vulcan was upon him.

Commander Spock felt the thrill of victory course through his veins. At last! At long last he had the galactically famous and cunningly brilliant Federation Starship Captain in his power.

The Enterprise and her Captain had been the cause of many a Vulcan/Romulan venture's defeat, as well as the disgrace and death of many of his peers. But now, today, those defeats and losses would be avenged.

When the Human stumbled and fell without regaining his feet, Spock's mouth quirked in an expression of grim amusement. Apparently the only advantage this famous enemy of his people had was in his illogical tactical manoeuvres. There was certainly nothing of the lightning physical reflexes common to Vulcanoids in this Human's stiff, clumsy movements. Nevertheless, the Vulcan was cautious, and slowed his approach a fraction.

His caution saved his life and prevented serious injury.

The Human had staggered to his feet, as if to face death standing, but when Spock raised his dagger all impressions of mute surrender vanished. With a swiftness that surprised him, the Federation Captain lunged at him, the dagger in the Human's hand aimed for his heart.

Spock barely side-stepped in time, lost his balance, and rolled halfway back down the hill before regaining control. Coming up in a crouched position he looked for the Human, only to receive an armful of his enemy's hurtling body.

This time the Human's dagger penetrated to the hilt in his chest, barely missing his liver. Effortlessly, he heaved the Human away and rose to his feet. Automatically he mentally set the ripped cells and blood vessels to repair themselves and pulled the dagger out.

Spock's dark eyes fixed on the Human, who again lay sprawled upon the ground, unmoving. Beside the tousled brown head was a fist-sized rock; perhaps the enemy's head and the rock had made contact.

Spock took a step towards the Human, and gasped. Pain filtered into his mind and coursed down into every muscle and nerve of his body.

Exhaustion. Defeat. Yet a last ditch mental command to make one more attempt to save his ship, his crew... the Federation...

"No!" Shocked, Spock backed away. The pain, those thoughts... alien! Not his.

Not his - but the Human's.

Kirk lay perfectly still, waiting. Just beneath the hand hidden under his body was the dagger the Vulcan had lost in the fall. His plan was simple: let the Vulcan come to make sure he was dead, then plunge the second dagger into that sadistic head. Incredible, for

the Vulcan still to be alive after that dagger to the heart...

Such thoughts abruptly ceased as Kirk sensed the Vulcan's cautious approach. An eternity passed before the alien's hand gripped his shoulder. Unconsciously he stiffened at the contact, his hand closed over the dagger, and...

Thoughts - alien, questioning, fascinating - flooded his mind. There was a dizzying perception of being two at once, a reinforcement of his physical pains as perceived by another, and a body, a mental strength, power and heightened senses that gave the situation an odd, off-key tilt.

Sick, frightened, he tried to get away, to use the dagger. A clamp of steel locked about his wrists, pinning his arms over his head. Another locked about his throat, almost cutting off his already laboured breathing. He looked up - and gasped in astonishment.

The Vulcan's helmet had been lost in the fall, revealing to Kirk's disbelieving eyes a face he had seen in many a dream - or nightmare.

"You!" he choked.

"You!" the Vulcan echoed. "What are you? What have you done to me?"

Kirk struggled vainly to avoid the long fingers that reached for his face, to no avail.

The meeting of their minds was like an explosion. Blinding light, and a confusion of sensations, emotions, reactions.

"NO-O-O-O!"

The scream tore from both their throats as each fought to free himself from the mind-meld neither knew how to control, or to break.

"Enough."

Both the Human and Vulcan looked up to find a slender young boy dressed in a silver robe gazing down at them.

"Gentlemen. The time is now for a decision on the part of each of you that will determine the future of your respective species, and the galaxy."

The Matron's grey-blue eyes fixed on Spock. The language was Vulcan.

Spock looked down to find his dagger in his hand.

"The Human is your enemy, responsible for the deaths of comrades and relatives. Kill him."

He sat up and turned his dark eyes upon Jim Kirk.

JIM KIRK!

The enemy was no longer impersonal, no longer unnamed. The body beside him was alive, vital, vulnerable. And the mind - depthless volumes of new, never before experienced perceptions and knowledge. Most important, with this Human as catalyst, he now had the Gift of Mind, the lack of which had made him an outcast among Vulcans and Romulans in spite of his family's royal lineage, for lacking it, he had no more right to speak his mind than a child.

Now - at last - he was whole.

With an effort he tore his eyes from those inviting, hostile, hazel depths and looked up at the Metron, who said,

"The future of Vulcan, the Empire, and yourself will be irrevocably changed if the Human does not die at your hands."

Time seemed to stand still for Spock. His eyes returned to the Human, who lay quiet, unmoving, beneath his hands. Memories of his life filtered through his mind.

The alienation.

The aloneness.

Apart even when among his own.

Son of a Human woman captured and enslaved by his father during his fourth Madness, his life spared because of his father's and sisters' intervention, because he was his father's only son.

So far.

Sarek could expect to suffer twenty more seasons of Madness, twenty more chances for a son, an heir pure-bred.

He lifted his eyes to the Metron. "Vulcan, the Empire and my family will make their own future." The dagger fell from his hand, long fingers reached to touch those sensitive, vital nerve centres in Kirk's face. "But my future is with him."

The Metron nodded. "So be it."

Now the Metron's grey-blue eyes settled upon Jim Kirk. "Captain." The language was English.

Slowly, carefully, Kirk sat up, unable to believe the lack of pain and exhaustion in his body. A sudden weight in his hand made him look down. The dagger gleamed in his palm.

"The Vulcan is your enemy, responsible for the deaths of many of your comrades, friends and Federation colonies. Kill him."

Kirk's hand closed over the dagger. He turned to face the Vulcan who sat beside him, unmoving, watching, waiting.

The Vulcan - the enemy with those velvet eyes of night, with those fingers of strength and gentleness, whose very touch negated

that terrible void of loneliness that had been his from the day he entered Starfleet Academy, proved himself the brightest, most cunning leader and tactician of the century.

The Federation's twelve battlecruiser fleet had won three decisive victories against the Empire due to his leadership. It was a constant struggle on his part to avoid being promoted to the Admiralty, or some such deskbound rank.

Always he had refused, knowing he would be unable to endure the further alienation such a promotion would bring, like the alienation that had come when he was permitted to enter the Academy at so young an age, had finished in half the time, had made the Captaincy so young.

So young - and alone for so long.

Of course there was Dr. Leonard McCoy, longtime friend and physician; and Montgomery Scott, Chief Engineer and command confidant, a man to be trusted, and so much like his deceased father. More dependable than First Officer Mitchell.

His First Officer, Gary Mitchell. Once he had believed Mitchell to be a friend - a long time ago. Ambitious, manipulative, clever; a man never to turn one's back on.

Then there were the women in his life. Companions of the body, never of the mind and soul. And the three who had been were dead, lost to him forever.

Yes, always that void in his soul had been with him, a part of him. Until today.

The touch of an alien, an enemy, had given him an experience, a depth of sharing never before dreamed of.

His eyes wandered from those dark alien eyes to the dagger and back again. Distantly he heard the Metron's voice warning,

"The future of Earth, the Federation and your ship will be irrevocably affected if this Vulcan does not die at your hands."

His ship and crew.

His world, his only reason for living.

McCoy. Scotty. Uhura. Chekov. Sulu. And four hundred others who trusted him, followed him, would die for him.

Could he sacrifice them?

No.

He raised the dagger to strike, but made the mistake of looking at that satanic visage one more time.

Eyes of Night. My Soul's Light?

Warrior of Death.

My Soul's Answer Bereft?

Wordlessly, as if out of time and eternity, he received his answer.

The dagger fell from his grip and his head bowed in shame.

With this act he knew he betrayed all he valued and loved.

The Metron nodded. "So be it."

The Vulcan and the Human found themselves alone among the rocky terrain, facing each other, the daggers in the belts at their waists.

Spock reached out, lifting the Human's bowed head until their eyes met. The action came easily to his muscles and reflexes - so easily it surprised him. Vulcans were not prone to touching physically due to the high receptivity of their minds to their surroundings. Of course, he had never had that concern - until today.

The emotions and feelings of Jim Kirk flowed through the tips of his fingers, through his body, into his mind.

Kirk took a half step backwards, away from that touch, swaying with weakness.

Spock let his hand drop.

"This is new to me also," the Vulcan said. "I am drawn to you, very strongly. Care must be taken that I do not overwhelm, dominate you. You are so alien, so fragile."

The Human stiffened at those words, his hand falling to the dagger. Feeling fully fit and vital, his natural command qualities asserted themselves. "I'm no weakling, Vulcan," he grated.

"No, not among your own kind. But among my people you will require protection, training."

"Wait a minute. What do you mean, 'among your people'?"

"We must return to Vulcan. I, too, require training in these matters."

"What matters?"

"The touching of our minds."

"You mean these perception distortions?"

Spock nodded, accepting Kirk's description of the experience. "We must return to Vulcan. My eldest sister, T'Phoneia, is a Master. She will teach us to guard ourselves against others, and to touch without pain."

"Touch..." Kirk took another step backwards.

A sudden pain of loneliness filled Spock. "You fear me. My alienness, my difference."

There was such sadness, despair in the Vulcan's tone that Kirk stopped his retreat. "No, I... don't fear you. Not... really. It's just that you're a Vulcan. Your Empire is irrevocably opposed to my people's Federation," he said finally.

"That may change," Spock said noncommittally.

Kirk looked at him sharply.

"Now that I am whole I can take my place on the Imperial Council, add my voice to the wearers of IDIC, the followers of NOME. They detest war, violence, declare it to be the game of savages."

"So do we of the Federation. We are no threat to your Empire. Our people have no ambitions of conquest. We are explorers, settlers." Kirk straightened. "Nevertheless, we are no weaklings. We will not be conquered, subjugated, enslaved. We know how to fight - and will, if your people force us."

"Of course," Spock nodded. "It is such an attitude that the warriors, the followers of the Ancient Ways, are counting on. They wish war. It is their glory, their life's quest. Blood. Violence. Death."

Kirk studied the Vulcan. "And which side do you prefer, Spock?" the Human asked very quietly.

Spock tensed slightly. So the Human had received something in the exchange also - his personal name. "I have gone the way of the ruling faction, the Warriors. Now, however, I am whole, adult. I will choose and act accordingly."

"And that choice?"

Spock looked into the hazel eyes. "You would not remain passive while my people killed yours. Nor could I, if one of mine harmed you." The Vulcan shrugged. "Logically all hostilities between my Empire and your Federation must cease."

"I'd like that," Kirk smiled. "I'd like that very much."

"And I."

"Do you command sufficient power to bring it about?"

"My father and sisters do."

"Will they back you?"

"Yes - or destroy me."

Kirk drew his breath in sharply. "Then... your decision to spare my life today was also an act of betrayal of your culture, as mine was of my culture?"

"Yes."

Again there was silence between them.

Kirk suddenly looked to the sky. "Our ships - I wonder what they're doing?"

Sulu stared at his instrument readings in astonishment.

"Well, Lieutenant?" Mitchell demanded impatiently. "What is it?"

"Sir, I... we..." Sulu threw a helpless look at Ensign Chekov, the navigator.

"Lieutenant!" Mitchell growled.

The oriental helmsman turned, took a deep breath, and plodded on. "The instruments show a two parsec change in our location. We are no longer orbiting the star system."

Mitchell took his time digesting this incredible information. "The Vulcan ship? Any sign of it?"

"No, sir."

"Hmm. I guess Kirk won." The First Officer glanced round expectantly. "But didn't survive the encounter." He looked meaningfully at McCoy, reminding everyone of Kirk's physical condition of the past months.

"You're not planning on going back to make sure?" McCoy demanded angrily, but he knew the answer already.

Long ago the senior officers had banded together to protect their Captain from his clever and ambitious First Officer. In the beginning it had been difficult, due to Kirk's strong sense of loyalty and his personal friendship for Mitchell, but lately Kirk seemed to have become wise to his second-in-command's less than absolute support. Nevertheless, their Captain - sensitive, fair minded - was not one for hasty action, either in the severing of friendship ties or the replacement of a senior officer. Besides, Mitchell was a good First Officer, much too ambitious and well trained to do anything that would jeopardise his career and future.

"Calm down, Leonard," Mitchell said in that charming, easy-going manner which they'd all come to see as false, manipulative. "We'll stay long enough to be sure."

"Shall I set course back to the star system?" Chekov inquired.

"No, we'll wait here. These superbeings have the power to do with us whatever they will. They put us here. We'll stay - for a while."

Glances were exchanged by the bridge crew. There was nothing to do but obey, wait. Mitchell's decision made sense, was proper, yet all knew that if the choice was theirs they would have at least made an effort to return, to find the Captain.

Scott and McCoy exchanged meaningful glances. They had discussed on several occasions the possibility of one day risking court martial by openly defying Mitchell and taking command of the Enterprise in order to help or save Jim Kirk. Both realised that that time might have come.

Kirk whirled and felt his heart drop to his feet. Five Vulcans were materialising on the rocky terrain. Five sets of dark eyes fixed on him with undisguised hostility. One, a woman, started towards him, her hand drawing the dagger at her side.

Spock stepped between Kirk and his officers. "No, T'Jon. This Human is mine. He is not to be touched. Any who harms him will be

challenged by me."

"You protect a Human? Why?" T'Jon demanded. She was Spock's second-in-command and Science Officer.

"Open your minds. Reach for mine."

Puzzled, they looked at him, not quite believing what his command suggested.

"Touch my mind," he repeated. "But take care - I have no training."

Their touch was less traumatic than Kirk's. Telepaths from birth, they knew how to touch a mind without intruding.

"You... are whole!" T'Jon exclaimed.

Spock blinked, surprised at the flow of emotion from T'Jon. She was unaccountably pleased. Unconsciously, he allowed himself to absorb the reactions of the other four. Tek, his warriors' subchief, also seemed pleased, while the other three warriors radiated mere surprise and curiosity.

"Today is indeed a day of triumph for the Empire. The enemy ship, the legendary Enterprise, has been destroyed, and now the son of Sarek is at last a part of the People, the All."

Spock stiffened at her words. He was already turning even as Kirk demanded,

"The Enterprise - what about her? My crew?"

The conversation of the Vulcans had been in their native language, and Kirk had lost his translator. His eyes looked into Spock's, reading the answers to his questions.

"No..." the Human gasped. "No..."

Kirk swayed as if all the strength had been drained from his body. Spock was beside him instantly, hands on the broad shoulders in support.

At the contact the Human's grief washed through him. Faces - alien to him but precious to the Human - marched through his mind.

Kirk jerked away from the Vulcan. "Get your hands off me! You... murderer! Savage! Devil! You killed my people! No... not you... I..."

The dagger was suddenly in Kirk's hand. Quickly T'Jon and the others drew their weapons and circled the Human.

"Captain..." Spock began.

"Captain? Of what?" Kirk spat. "I let you live - and my crew die! I... betrayed everything. Everything. My people are dead. What right have I to live?"

Horror clutched at Spock's heart as realisation dawned. He moved faster than he'd ever done in his life, wrenching the dagger out of Kirk's hand, crushing Human fingers and bones.

"Ahhh!" Kirk screamed, clutching his useless hand.

"How dare you!" Spock's grip on Kirk's shoulders was bruising as horror was replaced with rage. "You are mine. My future. What right have you to seek death? I forbid it. If I must control you, I will."

The Human stood limply beneath his hands. There was something frighteningly quiet and empty about Kirk.

Fear replaced rage.

"Jim." Spock's hands went to Kirk's temples, deliberately seeking to re-establish that binding link, but the Human's pain and loss could not be penetrated.

"Spock?" It was T'Jon, questioning.

He looked at her. "His ship and crew are everything to him. Their loss has taken his will to live."

She looked from Spock to the Human and back. "We did not see the Enterprise destroyed," she said in carefully precise Terranian.

Spock turned back to Kirk. "Captain, the Enterprise's destruction is merely an assumption on the part of my officers."

Slowly the Vulcan's words penetrated Kirk's grief-numbed mind. He lifted hazel eyes to look into Spock's.

"Please. Show me that my crew and ship are unharmed and I'll... go with you willingly, be whatever you want, do anything," Kirk said.

"Agreed," Spock said after a moment. "T'Jon, have us beamed aboard the Vermithax immediately."

Half an hour later, in deep space, Spock admitted the futility of searching for the Federation ship by conventional means.

"We must acknowledge the fact that the Metrons' powers are beyond our abilities to penetrate."

He addressed Kirk, who stood beside his command chair. The Human was showing avid interest and curiosity in his surroundings, his grief notwithstanding.

Tek and the Vulcan bridge crew did not like the Human's presence one bit, especially when they learned the identity of their commander's captive.

Captain James T. Kirk.

Aware of his crew's uneasiness and suspicion, Spock pointedly ignored it. For the moment at least he was more concerned with keeping Kirk interested, occupied - alive.

"Then I'm never to know what became of my ship and crew? You'll just take me to Vulcan now, right? I should be enough of a trophy," Kirk said bitterly.

Sadness stirred in Spock's soul. Nothing he could do or say

seemed to convince the Human of his peaceful non-violent intentions.

"Perhaps there is a way," T'Jon said.

Spock and Kirk looked at her.

"Am I correct in assuming that the Human somehow made you whole?" She addressed Spock.

"Yes."

Disbelieving eyebrows went up all around the bridge.

T'Jon nodded. "Then when you take your place on the Council, the Empire will make peace with the Federation."

"I will not kill one whose soul has touched mine. He is my First Contact. His life is like unto my own."

"Of course," T'Jon said. "Thus the possibility of a psi-bond search."

A slanted eyebrow lifted on Spock's face. "I...know not how to conduct such a search."

"I will direct, monitor," T'Jon answered.

Minutes later, in the privacy of Spock's quarters, the Vulcan stood behind the seated Human and placed long fingers on Kirk's temples.

Recalling the devastating experience of their first contact, Kirk was leery of this experiment, but was desperate enough to try anything to find his ship and crew.

With T'Jon's trained mind acting as balance and guide, Spock's and Kirk's minds came together easily, painlessly.

"Now, Captain, think of your ship and crew, of someone aboard whom you trust, of their location."

Kirk concentrated, obeying the voice in his head.

McCoy paced back and forth in Scott's office.

"Relax, Leonard," the Chief Engineer said. "At least we're on our way back to the area where we last saw the Captain."

"Oh, sure. Six hours later. Plenty of time for those pointy-eared devils to do who knows what to Jim!" The doctor vented his anger, frustration and fear.

"I know," Scott agreed, feeling much the same as McCoy but not inclined to let it show.

"Scotty... Scotty, what if..." the doctor's blue eyes reflected a terrible fear "... if Jim's dead?"

"Or even a prisoner of the Vulcans," Scott said very quietly.

McCoy stopped, looking at him.

"It's not official, Leonard, but you know as well as I that the Captain is the Admiralty's top advisor and operational assistant."

"What are you saying?" McCoy whispered, but he already knew the answer.

"Starfleet will have to undergo some drastic changes if the Vulcans break the Captain."

"Scotty..."

\\Bones... Scotty...

The two men broke off, clutching their heads. "What...? Who...?" McCoy cried, looking around.

\\It's me, Jim Kirk. Thank god all of you are all right. I... had to know.

"Captain? Captain?" Scott said doubtfully, uncomfortable at not being able to see to whom he spoke. "Where are you, Captain?"

\\With the Vulcans. I have to go with them. There's a fleet of them - five ships. They... The Commander was leading us into an ambush when the Metrons intervened.

"How do you know these things? And how are you... communicating with us? It's like ye're in my mind, sir."

\\It's called telepathy - thought projections. Common among the Vulcans, it seems.

"They read minds!" Scott and McCoy paled in horror.

"Jim, are you all right?" McCoy asked.

\\Yes. It seems this ability is a big thing among Vulcans. The Commander was unable to... use his until we met on the asteroid. He's grateful, and has pledged to seek peace with the Federation.

"Can we believe that?" Scott demanded.

\\I don't know, came the honest reply. *\\Bones, Scotty, this projection is very tiring. I have to go now. Don't look for me. They're taking me to their home world...*

\\Enough. An alien, unknown male voice spoke. *\\Your Captain is unharmed and will not be harmed. And now he knows that you are unharmed. Return to your space. Within one of your standard months you will know whether there is to be continual war or peace between the Federation and the Empire.*

"Who is this?" McCoy demanded. "Where's Jim Kirk?"

Silence was the only answer they got.

Kirk slept for forty-eight hours.

"They are such a fragile species. Strange that they have

resisted the Empire for so long," observed T'Jon at the briefing council.

Present were Spock, T'Jon, and the four sub-commanders of the fleet's other ships. All eyes were upon the sleeping Human who lay in Spock's cabin. The Commander reached over and snapped off the viewscreen.

"The Human should be under surveillance at all times." Sub-commander T'Long addressed Spock. "He is the enemy, very clever and resourceful. Too dangerous..."

"He is the enemy no longer. The Empire will make peace with the Federation, or I will renounce my citizenship," Spock told them point blank.

They looked at him in astonishment. "How dare..." began T'Long, outraged.

"He dares, sister," T'Jon intervened. "Spock is whole now, and the blending of minds between him and the Human is a Beauty beyond the experience of many."

"And if your family and the Council forbid such an alliance?" T'Long demanded.

"I am an adult. I make my own decisions."

"T'Lind may be of a different mind."

Spock drew his breath in sharply. T'Lind, ruler of Romulus, was his bondmate, yet their bonding had never been complete. He, a psi-null, had been unable to respond as a true Vulcan should to her need. Nevertheless, she had not seen fit to disown him, and had even taken his mother, the Human Amanda, into her royal household, a kindness no doubt as a result of her soul-kin with T'Phoneia, his eldest sister. T'Phoneia and T'Lind were warrior-sisters from childhood.

Spock knew that only with their support could he stop the hostilities between the Empire and the Federation. T'Phoneia was warrior leader of all the Imperial Warriors - Vulcanus, Romulus, Remus, Rigel, Flinta, Cobur and other lesser Vulcanoid worlds. T'Lind ruled the largest alliance of worlds in the Empire, Romulus, and supplied over 65% of the Imperial armed forces. His own fleet was composed of 95% Romulans.

"Perhaps," Spock answered, feeling suddenly weary. "I am returning to Vulcanus at once with the Captain. Until that time my decision in this matter stands."

"You speak as if the Vermithax returns alone," T'Long said.

"It will. You and the other ships will remain here in this quadrant to insure that no harm befalls the Enterprise and its crew."

The expressions on his officers' faces were less than pleased. One's enemy - especially as successful and humiliating an adversary as Kirk and his ship - was not easily transformed into a friend.

"I am willing to consider the presence of another Human among us," T'Long said, "But not an entire ship."

"I did not request that you befriend them. Merely allow no harm to come to them. Aboard the Enterprise are many whom Captain Kirk values. No harm must come to them. He has been sensitised through contact with me and may be able to perceive any harm or injury done to them. Such could be dangerous, unsettling, while we undergo the training."

"True," T'Jon agreed. "The Human is incredibly sensitive. I estimate that he can survive only one Zio* without the training. His natural barriers have already deteriorated 75% with only two contacts with Spock."

There was a moment of silence among the assembly. Finally, reluctantly, they indicated acceptance of Spock's decree - at least until their Ziyar* said otherwise.

Of course Mitchell refused to believe McCoy's and Scott's story. "Mind projection across half a galaxy!" he scoffed. "Don't be ridiculous. I think you two have had a bit too much to drink. I know you're worried about Jim. So am I, but let's not get carried away. What do you hope to gain by this story, anyway?"

Scott and McCoy exchanged glances. They could tell by the expressions on the faces of the bridge crew that their story was a bit too much to believe.

"You heard the Captain's voice actually say that hostilities with the Empire will end?" Uhura, the Communications Officer, asked.

"Yes," McCoy told her, knowing that in spite of the doubt the African officer was thinking of a small merchant vessel that had been captured by the Vulcans three weeks ago; on board had been several members of her family, and her fiance.

"You also heard an alien voice speak," Mitchell reminded everyone. "Probably the same speaker. Kirk's voice was being imitated, no doubt. I can hardly believe that the meeting of one Vulcan with the Captain, face to face, is all it will take to stop this war."

McCoy felt his shoulders slump even as Scott nodded in agreement with Mitchell.

Within forty-eight hours, ship time, the Enterprise re-entered the Metrons' space and proceeded cautiously towards the asteroid. They encountered no opposition.

Four more hours were spent making scans of the asteroid, finding no life readings at all. At last Mitchell risked landing parties consisting of those most loyal to Kirk.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he found some excuse to strand us here," McCoy confided to Scott.

"Aye," the Chief muttered.

*Note: Zio - Vulcan for month Ziyar - Vulcan for Empress

Above, orbiting the asteroid, Ensign Haila, manning the sensors, straightened and turned in alarm to address Mitchell. "Four Vulcan ships just came into our sensor field."

Mitchell cursed and went to check it himself. "They've got us surrounded." He glanced at Lt. Palmer, Uhura's substitute, who activated the red alert siren.

On the planet Scott informed the search party of the situation above.

"Four to one odds," McCoy groaned. "and us without Jim."

"Well, if Gary gets the ship out of this intact he'll certainly prove himself a worthy successor to the Captain," Scott reflected.

"Yeah, I guess so," McCoy muttered.

One hour of tense waiting went by.

"Why haven't they done something?" Mitchell demanded, impatient and angry.

"You'd think they'd either attack or order us to surrender," commented Yeoman Rand, who was standing beside the command chair with the ship's recorder in her hands.

Mitchell nodded gloomily.

"Unless, of course, what Scotty and Leonard heard was true, and they've called off the war," she ventured.

A scoffing expression came onto Mitchell's face, but a few minutes later he gave an order which would indicate a test of the supposed peace. "Lieutenant Pinera, prepare to leave orbit."

Every head on the bridge turned.

"But sir, what about the landing parties?" Rand asked.

"There are four enemy warships out there. Do you really want me to drop our shields, even for a second? Do you have that much faith in McCoy's and Scotty's story?"

After a moment of silence Rand and a few others indicated that they were willing to risk it.

"No," Mitchell said firmly, with finality, realising that if he allowed it the crew would probably all choose to risk it. "It's too dangerous. And I am in command. We will retreat. This ship has lost her Captain and a valuable Starfleet officer. The Admiralty must be informed."

Dvon, Science Officer aboard the Romulan ship Hawakis, T'Lon's

ship, reported to her commander the Federation ship's withdrawal and apparent abandonment of its landing parties.

Sub-commander T'Long, now commander of the fleet, waited for half an hour before sending the other three ships after the Enterprise, and a landing party from her ship to find the Federation party.

Having traded places with T'Cin, the Hawakis' science officer, T'Jon beamed down to the asteroid. It took them only a second to locate the Humans - thirty six in all, in groups of six. Apparently they had been searching the asteroid for Kirk.

She and her warrior-mate Dari made it close enough to one party for her to recognise McCoy and Scott, the two Humans she had glimpsed in Kirk's mind.

"Doctor, Chief," she called in Terran, "I am Science Officer of the Vermithax. My commander has ordered against any hostilities directed at the Enterprise and her crew. Do you require assistance?"

Scott, McCoy and their party exchanged startled looks. "They know our names. They do have Jim," McCoy said bitterly.

"What are we going to do, sir?" asked one of the security specialists. "With the Enterprise gone we can't hold out for long."

"I know, laddie. I know," Scott replied gloomily.

"Do Human warriors practice Talshaya?" Dari whispered.

"Unknown," T'Jon said. "Why do you...? Oh, of course. If they do not believe us they may choose destruction rather than surrender."

T'Jon contacted the Hawakis, requesting a light stun beam be fired on all Humans on the asteroid.

Hours later the Humans opened their eyes in a strange sickbay. McCoy and Scott looked around. A Vulcan woman stood between their beds.

"I am T'Jon. My apologies for the method used to speak with you. Your ship's departure, leaving you on the asteroid's surface without provisions - this seems illogical."

"Oh, why?" Scott challenged. "Would you risk your ship by dropping the shields to beam up a landing party with four enemy ships around?"

"No." T'Jon nodded, understanding. "Then you are considered lost by your fellow crewmates?"

"Of course."

"As do you. You do not believe our protestations of a truce. No matter. I too am inclined to be doubtful. But until the Council and our Ziyar decree otherwise, the Fleet Commander's word is our law." She turned to leave.

"Where's Captain Kirk?" McCoy demanded.

"With the Fleet Commander."

"Aboard this ship?"

"No." And on that word she left them.

Mitchell and the bridge crew were speechless when the four Vulcan ships suddenly appeared on the ship's sensors with an offer to return the landing parties.

An hour later, after some complicated manoeuvring, the landing parties were safely aboard, relieved of duty, and confined to quarters.

"You've been prisoners of an enemy. You can no longer be trusted," Mitchell explained.

Though annoyed, and concerned about their futures, the suspended officers all understood and accepted the First Officer's decision.

During the next two months Starfleet Command and the entire fleet were on red alert. To everyone's surprise there was no hostile activity of any kind made towards the Federation or its colony planets by the Vulcans.

The question in everyone's mind...

Was it possible that the 100 year war between the Federation and the Empire was approaching an end?

On the desert world of Vulcan, at his eldest sister's home, Spock knelt in meditation. He was surrounded by the flora and vegetation of Earth, a garden contribution allowed his Human mother years ago by T'Phoneia and T'Lind. Spock had always wondered how the two had managed to obtain the seeds, but had never asked.

His meditation was abruptly interrupted when he sensed two Vulcanoid presences approaching Kirk's sleeping chamber. Quickly he rose to his feet and hurried into the house.

Kirk stirred and opened his eyes. The red planet's heat and thin atmosphere always left him exhausted and sleepy. He had come to welcome the mental exercises with Spock and other Vulcans, for only when he was in mental harmony with a native did he find the environment comfortable.

He started to sit up, then froze at the sight of the two women standing at the foot of his cot.

"An excellent specimen - for a Human," commented one of the women. The speaker was a tall, elegant figure dressed in a regal white and silver robe.

"Indeed," responded the other woman. She was as tall as the first, but wore the uniform of a Vulcan warrior.

"You speak Galactic!" Kirk exclaimed, surprised.

The warrior inclined her head in confirmation. "She who bore my brother is an excellent teacher of many things."

Kirk's eyes widened. "Then you must be T'Phoneia, Spock's sister." He sat up.

"Correct."

"And you," he addressed the other woman, "must be Spock's fiancée... or wife. I'm still not too clear on Vulcan family ties, and how they connect."

"You know all that you need to know for now," T'Lind said.

Kirk gave the two his most charming smile. Both were extremely lovely, he noted to himself.

As if reading his thoughts and wishing to return the observation, T'Phoneia returned the smile ever so slightly. T'Lind, however, stepped back as if violated.

"Control your thoughts, my foster brother," T'Phoneia warned gently. "T'Lind is not yet properly bonded."

At that moment Spock arrived, looking apprehensive. *\\Brother, are you harmed?* He all but ignored the two women, and went to stand protectively near the Human's bedside.

"I'm fine, Spock," Kirk answered aloud, feeling a sense of pleasure at his new friend's presence. "I was just being introduced to your sister and..." he continued, but was silenced by a touch to his shoulder.

Spock faced the women. "What is the Council's decision?" he demanded without preamble.

T'Phoneia took a second to study her half-brother. How wonderful it felt to have her beloved sibling whole, confident, and able to take on the entire galaxy if need be to protect the newest member of their clan.

"You have won, Spock. Kirk is yours. He has been accepted by the Family and the Clan as your bondbrother. His ability to awaken your mental powers clearly negates the false belief that his species is too barbaric to be worthy of our association. It is decreed: FROM THIS DAY FORTH THERE WILL BE PEACE BETWEEN HIS PEOPLE AND OURS."

There was no masking the look of relief on Spock's face. Slowly he turned to look down at Kirk. For a long moment only their eyes communicated, then Spock's long fingers touched Kirk's temple.

\\You are safe now, Jim.

Kirk drew a deep breath of relief. *\\Thank you. How soon before I can go home?*

Startled, Spock pulled away, breaking the mental contact.

"What is it, Spock?" T'Phoneia asked, noting her brother's sudden alarm. "What is wrong?"

"You would leave me?" Spock addressed Kirk in a strangled whisper.

"No." Kirk rose quickly to his feet, reaching to grasp the Vulcan's shoulders. "No. I mean... Spock, I can't stay here on this planet. I'm a Federation citizen, a Starfleet officer. I have a life, a career, a ship, friends, responsibilities." He stopped, unable to bear the pain that reflected in the dark eyes. After a moment he sighed deeply. "I will stay. I won't leave you, my bondbrother," he promised resignedly.

For a second gratitude shone from the dark eyes, but then they clouded again. "No. I will not keep you here, not when your soul longs to be elsewhere," Spock said, knowing that the kind of friendship he sought with this man would require the sacrifice.

"I cannot leave knowing how much it will harm you." Kirk was firm.

The two women looked from one male to the other.

"Then what is to be done?" T'Lind inquired.

Spock's decision to return Kirk to the Federation and to remain with the Captain as companion almost started a civil war.

Sarek, T'Lind and the Council feared that the Federation would either kill Spock or use him as a hostage against the Empire. T'Phoneia, while not happy about letting Spock go either, nevertheless supported her brother's decision. Perhaps to no-one else was it so clear how much Spock and Kirk belonged together.

"I won't allow any harm to come to Spock," Kirk assured the Council and Family. "I am a starship Captain, and one of Starfleet's top advisors to the Admiralty. They will listen to me - and believe me. Of course, it would help if you permitted all your Federation prisoners of war to come with us. Also, a diplomatic peace party."

After several hours of discussion the Council came to a decision.

Two months to the day after James T. Kirk's disappearance a Vulcan battlecruiser entered Federation space broadcasting peace signals. Intermixed with the signals were visuals of many Federation captives and prisoners of war. The Vulcan ship was quickly surrounded by three Federation starships. When called upon to surrender and be boarded the Vulcan crew offered no resistance.

Beaming aboard with weapons drawn, Starfleet Security was greeted by an impressive tall, dark haired female warrior, who identified herself as a representative of the Supreme War Commander of all Vulcanian military forces. Stepping forward, she placed into the hands of the Security Chief a tape detailing the Empire's offer of peace.

Several weeks followed while the Federation Council and Starfleet debated the validity of this peace offer. The freed Federation citizens were interviewed, interrogated, and had tests run on them to check on brainwashing and so forth. The Vulcan 'guests'

were also interviewed and examined.

Another four months passed on Vulcan for James Kirk who, along with Amanda Grayson, had not been included in the goodwill prisoner of war return.

During this time he and Spock continued their training in mental disciplines. When not engaged in that activity, Kirk spent his time with Amanda, who dearly enjoyed having Human companionship again. The young starship Captain's presence also gave her the opportunity to see and get to know Spock in a manner she had never been able to do before. As for Spock, when not with the Humans he was with T'Lind and other Vulcan contemporaries from whose companionship and activities he had often been barred because of his mind-silence.

At long last a message was received from T'Phoneia, who had gone with the peace envoy disguised as an ambassador, announcing the acceptance of the peace treaty by the Federation. Within the week Kirk, Spock, Sarek and Amanda boarded a Vulcan shuttle that took them to a rendezvous with the USS Enterprise.

The four stepped out into the hangar bay to be greeted by T'Phoneia and members of Kirk's crew. While the Vulcans exchanged very formal and reserved greetings, Kirk found himself being embraced and kissed by Uhura, pounded on the back by Scott, and his hand enthusiastically shaken by McCoy.

"Captain! Sir! Welcome home! How can I ever thank you? My family and my fiance are alive and safe, thanks to you." Uhura had tears in her eyes.

Kirk hugged her back. "I'm very happy to hear it, Uhura, very happy. But it wasn't me who brought about this miracle..."

"Sir, this is no time for modesty. Ambassador T'Phoneia told us how you persuaded the Council to release all Federation prisoners as a show of good faith while you remained as a hostage."

"That's right, Jim," McCoy said, moving to give his friend a good strong bear-hug of welcome now that Uhura had released her hold on Kirk.

Kirk accepted the praise but gave T'Phoneia an odd look. "Thank you, all of you, but I can't take all of the credit. Anything I might have done would have been useless if it were not for Fleet Commander Spock." Kirk turned to find Spock still standing near the shuttle entrance, the dark eyes fixed upon him with a kind of fevered intensity.

Though his family stood close beside him Spock looked and felt utterly lost and alone. Watching the Humans greet Kirk with such warmth and open emotional displays suddenly brought home to him the cultural differences between Humans and Vulcans. How could he, an alien hybrid barely into adulthood, compete for Kirk's attention and companionship against these long-established relationships of closeness?

\\Jim! Do not forget me!

"Spock." Kirk left his Human friends and hurried to the Vulcan's side. Gently he looked into the dark eyes.

\It is all right, my bondbrother. This is normal for us Humans. It in no way takes away from our special bond. Aloud, he said, "Come, my Vulcan friend. I want you to meet my crew, the best in Starfleet."

He turned back, called the group to attention, and introduced the Fleet Commander to his friends. "It was through Mr. Spock's efforts more than anything else that we now have peace."

McCoy and the others all moved forward with smiles and emotional openness of thanks for the Fleet Commander, but Kirk intercepted them, stepping in front of Spock protectively. Very quietly he explained to this group of friends about Vulcan customs of reserve, logic and emotional control.

As expected his crew governed themselves accordingly, very formally and respectfully expressing their thanks to the Vulcan. Even so, Dr. McCoy, having observed the silent communication between Kirk and the Vulcan, was not above making his place in Kirk's life very clear.

"Well, Mr. Spock, sir, let me welcome you to the Federation and the society of Humans. We're basically a friendly bunch so don't expect to be too much of a loner if you intend to stay among us."

The doctor moved to stand beside Kirk, placing a casual arm around his shoulders. He wasn't surprised to see the Vulcan note the contact and stiffen in disapproval.

Kirk also was giving McCoy an odd look. In spite of their longstanding friendship, it was rare for the doctor to be so physically open.

"All right, you two," the Captain addressed them good-naturedly. "The war between Humans and Vulcans is over. I expect both of you to act accordingly."

"Yes, Captain."

"Of course, Jim."

But both Vulcan and doctor continued to eye each other warily.

Then Gary Mitchell, accompanied by several representatives of the Federation Council and Starfleet Command, entered the bay.

"Well well, the golden wonderboy has returned," Mitchell greeted, moving forward to shake Kirk's hand and clasp his shoulder.

"Hello, Gary," Kirk responded in a less than enthusiastic manner.

As the Council and Command representatives each personally welcomed Kirk back, Mitchell continued, "I see you've managed the impossible as usual, Jimmy-boy. I hear that you single-handedly ended this 100 year old galactic war."

"Not quite single-handedly," Kirk said, and everyone expected him to introduce Spock to Mitchell. Instead he guided the representatives over to meet Amanda and the other Vulcans.

Standing side by side, McCoy and Spock both stared at the First Officer with dislike. T'Phoneia, also, looked none too pleased at

this Human's presence. He had been among the group that had argued the longest and loudest against trusting the Empire's overtures of peace. Although he had no personal reason to dislike Mitchell, Spock could not help but sense the attitudes of his sister and the doctor. He was not certain why or how, but he felt very strongly that Mitchell was a threat to him, and to Jim.

A short time later, at the reception party in the main rec room to welcome their Captain and his Vulcan guests, various members of the crew took the opportunity to speak with Kirk and express their joy at his safe return.

"You realise, of course, Jimmy-boy, that until you've been debriefed I'm in command of the Enterprise," Gary Mitchell said, coming up to stand beside Kirk. "But then you might not be interested in commanding a starship any more now that you've discovered your gift for diplomacy." The First Officer grinned ever so hopefully.

For a moment Kirk locked gazes with his old friend. As he did so he sensed Spock move to stand at his shoulder.

"No-one is going to take my command away from me, Gary." His voice was very quiet, but firm. "Not without a fight."

Having overheard the conversation T'Phoneia, along with McCoy and Scott, came to stand near Kirk and Spock.

Looking at the group, Mitchell's grin became a bit tight. "I see you've added two more watchdogs to your entourage, Jim... er... Captain, sir."

"Mr. Mitchell, your dry wit is becoming downright insulting," Kirk informed him bluntly. "I suggest you shut up before you're forced to swallow your teeth."

Mitchell blinked, stunned at this blatant verbal expression of a long-time friendship on the verge of oblivion. "Sure, Jim. Anything you say. I mean, Captain. I guess living among Vulcans for six months destroyed your sense of humour." He grinned apologetically and made a hasty retreat towards another group.

Kirk watched Mitchell go and took a deep, shuddering breath. The severance of his relationship with Mitchell had been a long time coming. It had been inevitable. Gary had always been ambitious, and had never been above stepping on and using a friend to obtain his objectives. Even so, he felt the loss of any relationship deeply, as if a void was now opening in his soul.

Then, abruptly, the emptiness faded. Spock's steadfast presence made itself known in his mind and heart. He started to turn to speak to his Vulcan bondbrother, but caught McCoy and Scott looking at him with expressions of wonder.

"You know, Jim, I think your little stay among the Vulcans might have done you some good after all," McCoy commented.

"Of that I have no doubt, Bones." Grinning, Kirk looked at Spock. With the Vulcan Fleet Commander as friend and bondbrother, the Captain of the Enterprise knew he need no longer tolerate false friends just for the sake of companionship.

McCoy shifted his attention to Spock again. Spock, feeling more

secure of his place at Kirk's side in this new environment, met the doctor's scrutiny confidently. After a moment McCoy shrugged, as if in acceptance, and grinned.

Watching them, Kirk knew that these two would become friends of a sort. In fact, he felt sure that Spock would soon come to appreciate all of his true friends, and that they in turn would come to appreciate and befriend Spock.

"Captain?"

Kirk looked around to find a young blonde woman standing beside him. After a moment he recognised her as Commander Cani, personal aide to the Commanding Admiral of Starfleet.

"Ms. Cani, you are just the person I wanted to see. I want to make arrangements to talk with the Admiral as soon as possible concerning personnel reassignment within the Fleet."

Cani smiled. "That a coincidence. The Admiral asked me to approach you on the exact same subject."

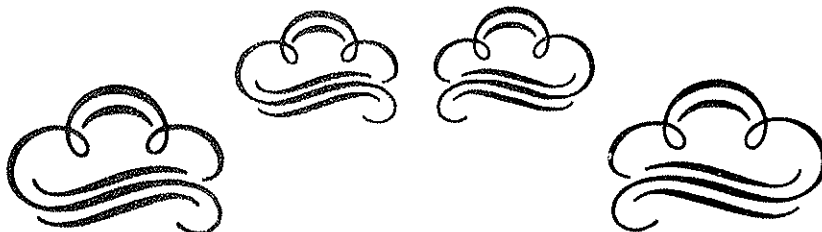
Kirk returned the smile and took the Commander's arm to escort her towards the refreshment table, marshalling his thoughts as he did so. It was his intention to propose that the Federation and Empire start to combine their Starfleets, and that an intermixing of personnel begin. For instance, why not promote Gary Mitchell to a command of his own, leaving an opening aboard the Enterprise for a First officer with command experience? And who would have better command experience than a Vulcan Fleet Commander?

T'Phoneia and Spock stood side by side watching Kirk and the blonde female. Both could sense a high level of excitement and anticipation in their foster brother.

"What does it mean, T'Phoneia?" Spock asked in the manner of a worried little boy.

"I suspect that very soon you will be asked to accept an assignment aboard a Federation Starship called Enterprise," she predicted, her dark eyes twinkling with satisfaction.

Startled, he looked at her for a moment, then straightening his shoulders he walked over to take his place at his bondbrother's side.



SONG OF THE STARMAN

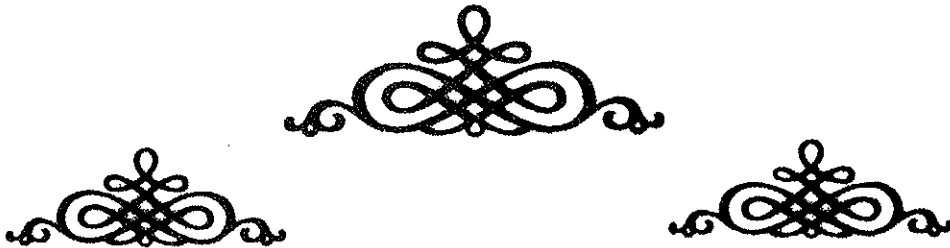


Oh, give me a silver starship
And a deck beneath my feet;
My heart will sing
And my soul take wing
As I go, new challenges to meet.

I long to sail among the stars
And walk on an alien shore;
My spirit will fly
As I touch the sky
And I will never ask for more.

And when I meet my destiny
And I'll be no more the rover;
Place my body to immerse
In the Universe
When the long trick's over.

Linda C. Wood.



SHADOWS

No journey is without hope,
and no path too lonely
with a friend to walk beside thee.
You are not even real -
or so they say -
yet our minds touch across the void
that parts us physically.
So how can we be lonely,
or know despair,
when we are part of a whole
that spans Time and Space,
waiting for a universe yet to come?

And come it will.

Sheryl Peterson

